Summit or Abyss

Potholes on the Road to Camp David

Several days before leaving for Camp David, the author of these lines sat in Barak's office with Danny Yatom and heard, not the details of course, what the direction of the Camp David delegation would more or less be.

It came across as if we were going to give Arafat much more than half the kingdom, that is, a lot more than had been given to him until now, and that there is more than one reason for optimism. Indeed, not two million reasons (the number of refugees awaiting to return to their home, according to the Palestinians), but the most bloody chunks of the conflict were to be placed on the table and there is a chance of cleaving the Gordian knot of hate.

These clauses were never put to the test of a summit with the entire world as witness and partner to the decisive round. "Our Ehud" was going to do this. Since '67 I had been convinced that without solving the two "end problems", there could be no real solution. As soon as I understood Barak was going to place them on the table I quietly said, as did many who knew, Yes!

After leaving Barak's office the doubts settled in. That same evening I had a long conversation with the journalist Amnon Kapeliouk. In the minds of many Kapeliouk was the Israeli with the most mileage with Arafat and who, among the Israelis, benefitted most from Arafat's trust. A day earlier he had returned from a sleepless night with Arafat in preparation for an article for Le Monde Politique.

I asked him, Amnon what will be? That is, what are Arafat's red lines and his ability to be flexible?

Kapeliouk as always spoke at length, expanded the territory Barak was about to offer, said that Arafat was not at all ready for the trip. In the end I understood from him that there is no chance of a breakthrough at Camp David.

Before takeoff Barak is in the throes of convincing members of Knesset not to vote against the government in the Likud's non-confidence motion. I spoke with Yatom and shared with him the impressions from my difficult conversation with Kapeliouk, including the latter's conclusive certainty that the Camp David Summit does not stand a chance.

Yatom, like Barak, believed there were problems and that they might not be easily resolved and perhaps not at Camp David. But a chance? There most definitely is one and it needs to be examined. At most there will be another round. In the meantime we will prove that we mean serious business. Before his departure, Barak declares his assessment that there is a "51% chance of an agreement" and orders the release of prisoners as a gesture. On the day he is scheduled to leave for Washington D.C. he goes to the Knesset to see if the efforts of the night before fared well. He loses the no-confidence motion 52 to 54. Shas voted against him and resigns from the government. Yahadut HaTorah was absent.

"Childish and spiteful politics," Barak says with contempt, rushing off to the airplane, realizing that he is off to a big battle with clipped wings.

Camp David: Gunman, not Pianist

Despite the no-confidence vote the hearts of the people take off with Barak as he leaves for Camp David; half are with Barak, half are against him, but the chambers of the heart are all fluttering. Hundreds of protestors on the way to Ben-Gurion Airport are calling for him not to forfeit the land of Israel. A camp of hunger strikers is set up in front of his office in Jerusalem. Photographs of him adorning a *kaffiyah* with the caption "Liar", similar to the photographs of Rabin, can be found in the cities' centers.

Against this rising orchestrated wave there is a support message of 28 senior reserve officers, among them, Ami Ayalon, Amram Mitzna, Yossi Peled, Israel Tal, Yaakov Turner and Ron Huldai who are saying to him: "we believe in you, go this way."

As opposed to the thousands of right-wing protestors, only several hundred "Peace Now" activists stand outside the terminal building at Ben-Gurion Airport. Barak can't see any of this, but every detail is reported to him. On the runway the customary ceremony for a Prime Minister is taking place. Carpet, band and all that, but this time the routine ceremony is mingled with the air of expectation and directly charged by the tension between the two parts of the nation. By the red carpet he meets David Levy, still wavering between government and resignation. Levy says to him: "I doubt if we will reach an agreement." Barak, who shares similar doubts with him, cannot seem to make clear to him how important the actual step is, regardless of its results. Levy, himself a shrewd politician, understands but refuses to bear the consequences, which will be a public crash. Barak notices Eli Yishay holding a letter from Rabbi Ovadya and wishing him good luck. A literal and figurative wave and the plane take off.

As he's on his way to Camp David, behind him a government whose pieces are falling like spacecraft propulsion rockets, Barak feels "like a rocket returning from space with the coating peeling off due to the heat of the return to the atmosphere and eventually only the core makes it to the destination." From here on in there is no turning back. Barak facing his fate. Barak, who has historical sensors, feels the rare beat in every fiber of his being, and yet? He falls asleep like a baby.

On the way, while the Prime Minister's plane is in the air, we are notified there is a bomb on the plane. Even if anyone thought it was one of those jokes, no one takes any chances. Senses heighten and the plane is scrupulously searched. Less than one year later Barak himself doesn't remember any bomb notice. "Yes? There was a report about a bomb? I honestly don't remember. Perhaps if you'd show me the newspaper report, I'd remember. There are constant warnings from the General Security Services (*Shabak*) about threats. This isn't something you make a big deal of. I don't deal with this because I trust the *Shabak*."

"Rabin also trusted them," he's reminded.

Barak is adamant: "I trust them 100%."

"Can't you see what is happening around us?"

"I can see."

"You don't want to know what is going on?"

"I don't ask for updates because they are burdensome. I don't ask who threatened to kill the Prime Minister. Avi Dichter and Ami Ayalon would say at our meetings that there is an increase in tension. There are within the Jewish Settlement [in Hebron] several extremists. There are some mystical organizations. But I don't have an actual operative role in this matter. I am a very purposeful person and I don't like to drive myself crazy. After all, they take care of the security. Nava used to ask sometimes, "what's with the security detail?" and I would say to her, they have their reasons and that's that. I was interested in this more in terms of the potential for civilian harassment of a massive civil resistance organization to the possibility of an agreement."

Barak knows that in the framework of the "civil resistance to an agreement" that he talks about, a prime minister has already been killed, and the assassinated prime minister took an even smaller step than Barak toward concessions. But his only response is: "this is why I am so understanding about the enhanced security arrangements."

In a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's subcommittee for the Secret Services, head of *Shabak* Avi Dichter clearly said: "Jewish extremists may hurt Barak and Arafat."

"The truth," says Barak with a wink, "if it adds anything, we can mix in this dramatic sauce, but really? I know that the possibility exists, but the *Shabak* is better-prepared than in the past, and I know that at the end of the day we have to do the heavy lifting. There is no point sitting as Prime Minister if you're not willing to do these things. If you don't want to do the heavy lifting, don't go into office.

"What concerns me is not the extremists. The most disturbing potential are former Special Forces people who encounter a sense of extremism and have moved over to the extreme right. These are people we taught how to operate."

Barak asks the security personnel how many people they know have moved over to the other side.

"I know their parents and uncles. These are people that I remember from my generation. We have to prepare against such with systematic thinking. These are guys we taught how to look at an operational system. We taught them that observation means finding the crack, preparing the response to it and entering through that crevice. These are the ones we should be bothered about, not about all kinds of young Breslevs bouncing about on the hilltops."

Following these questions by Barak, they would from time to time update him.

"But I didn't have the time to deal with this. This is why we have *Shabak*. I would say okay. Do what you understand."

On his way to Camp David Barak also hears and at the same time doesn't hear, warnings and threats, but his mind is locked on the narrow crevice through

which he might extricate an agreement that will bring the State of Israel to calm and tranquility.

"I am driven by Rabin's legacy," he says, "the fact that Rabin was assassinated on the road to the process makes it different than other segments of the road to peace. These were always big considerations: political, security and internal politics. The fact that an exciting vision of peace was spread out before us and the warrior leader was killed on the way to its implementation, cast a mythological and emotional dimension on the national collective level and I am aware of it."

He is aware of the fact that he is taking a much larger step into the minefield than the step Rabin took before him, but he lives with the feeling that he has no choice: "it is possible that we can't complete this road to peace, even if it requires a more far-reaching move than the one Rabin would have agreed to in his life or by nature. If it is not possible, we'll know it isn't. We can't drag this out or postpone for another five years, because then we will be in a worse position strategically, not to mention the number of graves that will be added during this time, eventually leading us to the place we are in now. This is why I have historical responsibility to check it out, even if it is dangerous."

* * *

He has a clear outline according to which talks will be run. He knows that eventually both he and Arafat will hit a stone wall. The question is whether Arafat will be able to overcome it. As to himself he has no doubt: "as opposed to the first Camp David Accords where they ran after Begin who wasn't always in top form and wasn't focused on the details and therefore sometimes manipulated, I am not into manipulations. I don't mind seeing the hard and painful facts. If we need to cut, I will decide."

On the other hand he says that it can definitely be that "the Palestinians are coming with the aim of delaying the talks about the framework agreements, in order not to get to them, and then get to a certain point at which they will say: we haven't reached the framework agreement, let's move to the default of implementing the third phase."

After having succeeded in implementing all the stages to his way, he reckons that it is "definitely possible that the Palestinians are formulating a strategy that says: let's not do anything with the talks about the framework agreement, and when the talks hit a wall they will ask me, Barak, a man of his word, what next? This won't happen because Barak didn't direct the talks well or because he didn't caress his partner to the talks. They have a vested interest in getting us to the third phase. Our interest is to bring them to the trial of the nations and the Clinton administration, asking whether or not they are serious. The point is that we are bona fide and are willing to go very far and they know I am serious. However, I repeat and clarify that if there won't be an agreement, there will be no movement of both parties, and we will not budge a millimeter. I come to Camp David knowing that our meeting, upon which the agreement will be based, does not have to be the midway. I've told them I

know that in terms of the reality the meeting will be much closer to your point of view, but you must shift."

On his way to Camp David, to the place in which he is supposed to see if there will be any shift or not, Barak is willing to also open the topic of Jerusalem and the right of return. He knows that without solution of these two issues, there will be no solution.

"In Stockholm this was raised implicitly," he says, "I didn't agree that Ben-Ami would discuss it. If they would have spoken about it, it would have come out. If not from us, then from them. Once out it would have destroyed the government and blown up the talks. You can't bring Jerusalem to the table before there is a framework agreement you can't go back on. Cannot go back on. Like with Egypt, this agreement would have been a watershed moment."

To prove that this isn't mere talk, he is decisive: "even if agreements aren't signed, we have no intention of backing down from the intent behind them. Our purpose is to examine empirically whether there is or isn't a serious Palestinian Authority that is willing to go the distance. If there is, I am prepared to go very far, and I am convinced that I can make this work in Israel. If there isn't, and we are in a process in which they are fooling us, I will not concede anything. This is the reason I am demanding the end of the conflict. It is not because I am suddenly enveloped by the spirit of the prophets Isaiah and Micah. This is a practical expression that I agree upon with the entire world, including Clinton and Kofi Annan."

The end of the conflict, according to Barack, is a situation in which "it will be documented in the agreement that at the end of each clause we agree upon it will state that this agreement is acceptable to all parties and that it is the response to 242 or 338, regardless of the formulation 'end of the conflict' or 'termination of claims', but rather the more profound thing. As soon as the agreement we signed replaces 242 or 338, 194 and 181, then we can go to the international bodies and tell them it has been replaced by a willing agreement of both parties. The above is the implementation of the decisions, and that there are no claims on either side. Only then Arafat will be forced to say to his people, and in Arabic, that he has conceded the right of return." As far as Barak is concerned this is a real achievement, "this is why I must be here."

Resolution 181 is the decision of the UN General Assembly of November 29, 1947 regarding the partition of Israel into two states. Resolution 194 is the UN General Assembly decision of December 11, 1948 on the principles according to which the issue of the refugees will be solved.

Barak knows that this is not only about far-reaching proposals, but a real upheaval in the perception of a large portion of the nation, and not only in the extreme right. The fact that this is a positive upheaval does not make it any less shocking, or the situation following the upheaval any less fragile.

At this stage Barak does not focus on the fact that the Palestinians too are having a hard time with the implementation of the proposals which do not correspond with their problems. His eyes are looking ahead, to the ability of Israeli society to display flexibility beyond the conflict between Jews and Arabs. He sees the internal

rifts that cannot be mended other than by a bold opening move that will be followed by peace.

"After a decade of efforts to attain peace, the State of Israel's paramount internal interest is our cohesiveness," he says, "and our status in the Jewish world, and our justice, without which we have no hold on the world. Without these we are preparing the background for much harder situations that we have no idea how they will turn out. I have a great responsibility to examine the true face of reality. Not what the right believes the reality is, or how it is perceived by the left. This is why I'm coming to see if there is any willingness. When the appropriate opportunity arises, I will take advantage of it. I am not Netanyahu, who even if he had the opportunity, wouldn't do anything with it. If there isn't an opportunity and they can't reach an understanding with us, then at least we will know. I am certain I can convince decent people that we have done everything we could have done. The main thing is that the nation stand united in the face of the difficult tests that are to come. If we go a different path and get pulled onto the track they are forcing upon us we will be in a situation in which we both give assets and stand in defense, and with the world on their side and the assets in their hands, we will be torn apart from within because we never tried to make peace. This is the coercive logic."

Journalists, veterans of the first Camp David, asked Barak on the way to his Camp David whether he intended to play the piano that's there.

Barak responded, according to the journalists, without missing a beat: "a gunman, not pianist comes to Camp David."

This sentence got out faster than as if had been transmitted by optic fiber. Members of the Palestinian delegation, who were in any case there against their will, noted this as a key sentence.

"Why did you have to shoot this provocation?" Barak was asked.

He looked at the inquirer with surprise: "tell me, do you really think that in the tectonic clash of the wishes of two nations a sentence or two either way will make a difference?"

He promises those around him: "we will make a supreme internal and international effort to attain peace. We will leave no stone unturned. But it takes two to tango. If the other side will be prepared to take a far-reaching step, he will find us there."

And what if the other side isn't prepared?

"Then we will at least be united and acknowledge reality as it is," he said and then added: "we can't assess whether something will come of this. It's the type of thing you can't know what might happen if you don't actually go in and examine it. It is clear to me that from the Israeli national perspective there is a historical necessity to examine this through and through. The process started in Madrid and Oslo created a great commitment on the part of the Israeli peace camp to the basic ideas underlying Oslo."

A Group of Clerks

There are quite a few who oppose to and are concerned by the Oslo Process, including Barak himself, and the way to check the suitability of the idea is to bring it to fruition and then bring it directly to the people. Barak intends on bringing the outcome of the summit, if there is an agreement, to the decision of the people, by referendum or elections. To do so, Arafat must past the test of Oslo.

Oslo, according to Barak, is a situation in which "for several years you give Arafat and his people responsibility for the lives of millions. You bring him back from Tunis and allow him control in practice, and hope it leads to a transformation of Arafat and his friends from terrorist leaders to those who can manage states and members of the family of nations. Now I must check if this worked and there is no way to check this assumption," says Barak, "without putting it to the test. And you can't put it to test under the political assumptions of the Israeli right. Therefore, I decided not to be deterred from trying to go very far and I will not be deterred from bringing this to the people. On the condition, of course, that I will have a frame agreement like at the first Camp David."

Barak is sure that if he has a framework agreement, the people will be with him.

"Indeed, there was a year between the framework agreement at the first Camp David and the signing of the peace accords with Egypt. Three weeks before Begin went to Camp David, polls showed only thirty percent for the agreement and seventy percent opposed the agreement. But I knew that our nation is prepared to go very far if it thinks there is a partner on the other side. This I have to examine. I was convinced I had the backing for peace of the brave and not peace of ostriches. There you first give everything and then discover you have nothing in your hand."

* * *

Barak chose to hold the talks at Camp David, an isolated military camp, for all the known and right reasons. He intended to control the media by means of an exclusive bypass channel. He didn't hesitate to insist on rules of the game that included even cutting-off phones. Each delegation had external phone lines only in the cabins of Clinton, Arafat and Barak. Privileges of leaders. All the others could only communicate among themselves in the camp. Cellular phones, which are almost oxygen lines for many of the delegates, were strictly forbidden. Barak did not hesitate to act like a military disciplinarian. "Anyone who uses their cell phone in the camp," he threatened, "will be thrown out." Guests, consultants and experts from the outside were allowed in only with the hosts' consent. The Americans accepted all his conditions, and even took a harder line on some.

They insisted that there be no more than 11 people in a delegation. Leaving the camp was permitted only with the doctor's approval or due to a family crisis. The compensation was a kitchen that worked around the clock, and Hispanic cooks

worked with military precision, sending out burgers at any time of day or night. Thousands of miles away Barak respected Nava's dietary instructions. Also, he didn't have much of an appetite.

"There was an uncertainty inside me," says Barak, "but not a fog. Of the type that was in De Gaulle's head at the talks in Evian. He didn't know whether or not there would be an agreement. He did this under heavy fire, including in Paris. But he knew one thing: if there is leadership on the other side, he has an agreement. With all the difficulties. If there isn't leadership, then there won't be. But you can't know until you check it out. All of this I share with Clinton before and during. I had dozens of conversations with Clinton. Maybe net forty hours. Of course he wanted to succeed too, but unlike Clinton, we had a long-standing interest in the case of success or failure - also in that we were staying and he was leaving. After all he won't be accused with why he didn't finish up. We will have to give serious answers to very serious questions. For example: why, eight years after Rabin was killed and it was possible to talk about a future agreement, didn't we do so. See what criticism there is today, in retrospect, about Barak whiling away the last four months before Camp David. If we wouldn't have gone to Camp David we could have never explained to ourselves why we didn't exhaust the opportunity. After all, what is the terrible risk related to us coming to Camp David and checking whether we can make progress toward peace? If it will be possible, we'll sign; and if we can't reach an agreement, we'll stand before the world united. And most important: we'll know internally what our limits are. The fact that as a result I would not be Prime Minister is not reason enough not to do the right thing in terms of my national responsibility for the state of Israel."

Barak's feeling is definitely – "historic importance".

How do you feel history?

"When you're there, you know," he says, "I knew that we had here a not-simple dimension of an experiment with unknown outcomes. When Menachem Begin entered Camp David, he too didn't know exactly how he would end up. Rabin didn't know, but he reckoned that if he finishes he'll pass it. And now let's assume for a moment that in terms of my consciousness I would say that we can obtain an agreement that meets our requirements in term of security arrangements, Jerusalem, right of return and ending the conflict. Not, Peres 'says' or Haim Ramon 'says', which is playing a game of chess with ourselves – only talk. Here I am going for a practical examination, and there can be no better examination than our group versus their group. Not two knighted horses charging at each other, but it is definitely a test of leadership."

* * *

In addition to leadership, Barak took "his group" with him; always an ad hoc group and not "his" in the sense of tribal or party brotherhood or even close friendship. He had 12 beds to fill and he had to put together a cadre that can deal with the agreement, if there be one, or explain the talks' failure, if the worst happens. Barak was

convinced that anyone not invited would understand - whether it was Sarid or Yishay - but that of course didn't happen. Everyone wants to carve their name on the melting pot in which the destiny of the state of Israel will be formed. Looking back, Sarid believed that had he been there he could have tilted the scales.

On Thursday, Barak gave his bureau chief Chaim Mendel the final list after Levy refused to join. On Friday, everyone saw the list in the afternoon newspapers.

With him on the delegation:

- Danny Yatom, confidant, worked closely with Rabin on the negotiations with Syria and Jordan.
- Shlomo Ben-Ami ("in the capacity of Foreign Minister, as David Levy was with one foot out the door"), who has historic patience and is willing to move forward if Barak loosens the reigns.
- Amnon Lipkin, as security backup. Lipkin's aura from his days as Chief of Staff is supposed to provide a "professional" umbrella for any situation Barak might encounter, and Barak knew from private conversations "the depth of Amnon's commitment to peace."
- Elyakim Rubenstein, the Attorney General, on behalf of the legal order.
- Major General Shlomo Yanai, who represented the security arrangements on the field level.
- Israel Hason, former deputy head of the *Shabak*, familiar with the details of the security arrangements with the Palestinian security forces and who is intimately familiar the negotiation heads, Dahlan and Erekat.
- Dan Meridor, as stand-in for Levy, in the capacity of right bumper and a personal friend of Barak. Barak had seen the historic responsibility with which Meridor, as close consultant to Shamir, dealt with the Gulf Crisis, also strengthening the moderate stance.
- Gilead Sher, confidant and lawyer.
- Gidi Grinstein, Sher's right-hand.
- Einat Gluska, secretary and administrator. Several days later Oded Eran joined as reinforcement.
- Reuven Merhav, who appeared one day before the end of the summit.
- Yossi Ginosar, who was the first Israeli to arrive, alone and at his own expense. Ginosar was required there by the Palestinians, Americans and Israelis, due to his status as everybody's man. As expected, there was a media riot that queried the presence of a private person in the place where the fate of nations is decreed. To push back criticism, Barak organized an American request for Ginosar's participation, while as far as he was concerned "Yossi came because he can talk intimately with Arafat." Barak demanded that Ginosar be counted as member of the American delegation, and so it was. All delegates received a "Delegation Member" tag. Yossi's tag said "Consultant".

"This group makes sense," Barak says. "If we obtain an agreement that will be acceptable to the group, we will be able to pass it among the Israeli people. If we can't bring an agreement, the group will know to explain it to the people."

There were problems with the group composition, mainly with those who weren't part of it.

"That's the way it is," Barak said, "Yossi Sarid, for example, thinks we took him out of Camp David because of the beds (Sarid claims Barak told him that there weren't enough beds), and not because the group composition was supposed to represent to the Palestinians and Americans a rigid cocktail that gives expression to the majority sentiment. Yossi doesn't perceive it that way. If they didn't take me, it's because of other things. If it fails, it's because I wasn't there."

In parallel to the delegation, Barak set up a public diplomacy (*hasbara*) headquarters at the embassy where the Ministers Yuli Tamir and Michael Melchior were representatives of the spokespersonship processes during the summit. His spokespersons, Merav Parsi-Zadok, David Zisso and Gad Baltiansky, worked alongside them. In parallel, outside of the official circle, Barak's campaign members Yoni Koren and Eldad Yaniv, who were supposed to manage the media battle in Israel. Barak has no problem calling them to Washington, even though the two of them expected to join his team after the elections and he rejected them. It's not him, it's the state that is summoning them, and he expects them to behave accordingly. Even if the state summons him, he won't consider anyone or anything, including himself, and stand forward.

The Battle of His Life, Without a Toothbrush

At nine pm Barak's entourage landed (the others were on the way) at Andrews Air Force Base. Two helicopters awaited the advance guard as they disembarked the plane, and immediately took-off to Camp David.

"There is a certain way you know you are entering a decisive battle. It's a strong sense of tension and alertness, together with an inward movement into a bubble of silence in a self-requirement of sorts for utmost concentration," and this feeling took over Barak. Only when he disembarked the helicopter at Camp David did he understand that he had arrived at his and the state of Israel's decisive battle without a toothbrush. His luggage had been left behind, in the Air Force's plane, and it was making its way by road.

At the Camp David helicopter pad he looked around at what was in Middle Eastern terms a surreal picture: pouring rain was coming down on the illuminated pad like a screen of glass beads sparkling in the light. As he disembarked the helicopter two Marines officers in full dress stood before him: the base commander and deputy. Behind them a line of golf carts each driven by soldiers, also officially dressed. The commander saluted stiffly and said to Barak: "welcome to Camp David," and then led him to one of the carts leading the rolling convoy among trees and lawns straight to the cabins allocated to them. Barak's cabin, Dogwood, was Sadat's cabin in 1978.

Barak feels almost at home. This was the cabin he and Nava stayed in only several months ago, when they spent a weekend with the presidential couple. Then it was a charming weekend with Hilary and Bill. This time, without Nava and Hilary, it was sure to be much less charming, certainly less familial, but with some help from friends, and despite the uncertainty, Barak has a chance of leaving here with a historic, painful, tearing agreement, but one that may change the face of the Middle East and perhaps the world. He reacquaints himself with the large living room, the bedroom and the small living room, which he planned to make into a meeting room. He assumed, with no disrespect to his hosts, that there may be a listening room, perhaps from when heads of states were hosted here during the Cold War. That is why he planned in advance to hold particularly sensitive talks on the balcony or in the nearby woods. He doesn't have a toothbrush, but in the morning he finds his suitcases lined up in a right angle outside the front door.

Before unpacking, Barak set upon the small details. Such as incidental psychological pressure. He instructs Sher to call Rob Malley, Clinton's man, within Arafat's hearing distance; in other words, the most acceptable person on the American peace team in the eyes of the Palestinians. Barak briefs Sher to tell Malley to tell Arafat that this is it. That this is the last chance, and he better mediate that statement as decisively as possible.

In the morning, before the talks begin, Barak met with Clinton on the cabin balcony, facing a grassy slope with a swimming pool and golf green.

"Look, Mr. President," he says to him, (its "Bill" only at two am and over beer) "we can't know where this is going. There can be two goals. One, an understanding of a historic moment and willingness to make decisions, and I am personally prepared to make hard decisions. The second, that we don't come out of here with an agreement."

Clinton was more than just a cordial host.

"He tried to create a warm familial atmosphere, but I kept saying that there are issues way beyond everyone's mood. It certainly could be that Arafat has a different goal - to obtain from us a document, considered binding in his perspective and internationally, a paper that documents positions that advance him, and then use this document as a platform for his next move, an attempt to internationalize the conflict. I repeatedly explained to Clinton that, all in all, what Arafat wants is not contradictory to what we know about him, but we, here, can at least prevent the manipulation. If our behavior rewards this conduct, it will encourage him to go in that direction. And most important: he has to understand in advance that nothing will be agreed on until everything is agreed upon. That we are not going to document anything on paper until it is clear, from the non-formal and undocumented talks, that there is going to be an agreement. If an agreement isn't obtained, then all the ideas raised here - and it's clear that we will raise ideas - will not be valid."

It seemed to Barak that Clinton understood how determined he was. Barak told him directly and in advance how he intends to run the negotiations: "I said that I am not willing for the negotiations to seem as if we are jumping forward and he remains in the same place. So we don't feel like suckers, he might throw us a bone

once in a while, by means of the committees, a speck of progress that can then be retracted if following it tempting ideas come up on his side."

Barak repeatedly told his team that they cannot be in a situation in which Arafat "makes fun of us all." From day one Barak decided to make it clear to Arafat that "all the ideas are not the basis for future demands."

To his team he explained that: "I am not telling Arafat that we can delete them from memory, but I am sending the message that he shouldn't expect a real discussion if he isn't willing to be decisive."

* * *

Barak knows that the route to a situation in which Arafat understands that he is serious passes through Clinton. Only if Clinton toes the line. He demands this of Clinton very clearly: "I told Clinton that Arafat needs to know that if the talks are only for setting down in writing and memory, he will come up against our and your, the Americans', rigid fundamental positions, standing together and without rifts, knowing that you are throwing your full weight behind this. However, you must present him with a reward: the possibility of American support of ten or twenty billion dollars for rehabilitating the refugees, for infrastructure for the Palestinians, for a shared economy - all backed by the G8. Without these two conditions there will be no agreement. And most important," Barak reiterates to Clinton, "he needs to feel the possibility of missing a one-time window of opportunity, and the threat and risk of finding himself in a worse situation, and of course he needs to feel the temptation."

Barak sits with the Israeli delegation and says in a measured tone, as he does when he wants his words to leave an impression: "I am not signing an agreement that doesn't anchor the hard core of Israel's vital and security interests. But I do know that "there will be no agreement if it doesn't address the hard core of Palestinian claims and interests."

Lipkin nods his head in total agreement, and Barak adds: "for us too there are steps that we won't be able to bring to the people. Jerusalem, for example, is a pan-Arab and not only a Palestinian issue."

With this he hints that Arafat isn't the only one playing this game. From here on in everyone enters the big playing field called the Camp David talks.

* * *

The site of the talks is a small camp, two miles in perimeter. Picturesque wood cabins as if planted in the woods. The negotiators go there and back on golf carts run on electricity. There is a joint dining room with a White House chef, specializing in kosher dishes, who was brought to the camp. And before each meal there is a friendly raising of glasses. Dinner is slightly more ceremonious, but still buffet style to create dynamics of closeness. On the other hand, the seats were reserved by name to prevent unnecessary friction.

"We are trying to be friendly," Barak explains the American probe and sell technique, "the atmosphere at Camp David, in the dining room and in social settings, isn't charged, but at the end of the day the problem is business and the nitty-gritty."

In practical terms, Barak impression was that, "it didn't feel like the Palestinians want to achieve a historic goal. Among the Israelis it did. Indeed, they didn't want to come. Arafat was the softest toward the summit. Later on it became clear that Abu Mazen and Abu Ala were more strongly opposed and they acted accordingly."

At two thirty in the afternoon, after briefing his team, Barak leaves for the first festive and photographed meeting in the central cabin (Laurel). At the entrance he meets Arafat and they wrestle lightly at the entrance. They are almost twenty years apart, in Barak's favor when locking horns. Arafat conducts himself softly physically, with fragility, so Barak actually leads Arafat in front of him as someone would put a stubborn horse in its starting position.

And the land raged.

Barak does not understand what the commotion is about: "we entered together into the first joint meeting and it seemed as though I pushed Arafat in. This isn't really what happened. It's a cultural gap, in the Middle East this seems jocular. To the Western eye it seems too physical. Impulsive and arrogant. I was raised under a code according to which this isn't so terrible and even friendly," he sighs, twists his face and shrugs, "but I accept the criticism. And what happened was that I tried to push him, so he tried to push me. And then the camera caught that split second in which I guided him in, with my hand, and with his back to me. I didn't imagine he would resist so strongly, and it came out as it did. Truth is that we were aware there were cameras. Because when we came downstairs we saw the camera men. But with all due respect to the footage, we are here to take care of other business."

In the meeting itself the three leaders talk about the historic opportunity that has come their way, about the responsibility and about the challenge, and Arafat concludes with "*Insha'Allah* [God willing] we will succeed in bringing a solution to both sides."

In a private conversation in the evening, Arafat tells Clinton with great candor that: "there will be no agreement without recognition in principle of the right of return. Afterwards we discuss the practical details. As for Jerusalem, the situation is simple: East Jerusalem to us and West to them."

When Barak hears this, he immediately says: "there's nothing to talk about, but there is a point in finding out the distance between principle and practice on the issue of the refugees and what exactly are East and West Jerusalem. This is the crevice through which we can hold the summit."

Clinton feels that if this is the point of departure then there really isn't anything to talk about and he conveys this feeling to Arafat quite firmly. Arafat rages and doesn't respond. Clinton goes back and reports to Barak. Barak hears the rules of the game according to Arafat, and guides the delegation to tread carefully without revealing positions so that the other side doesn't take ownership as if they were already in their pocket. "We have real internal read lines," he briefs the delegates,

“you each understand them and sense them in the way in which we describe the state’s fundamental vital interests.” From here on in he is supposed to trust the people not to cross those red lines, that is - not to say anything they haven’t heard directly from him and not to firmly oppose a topic that allows for flexibility. As far as he is concerned, he has done his part for now, and he awaits the Palestinian response to his offers.

It All Started Here

The First Stage: Four Teams, One Result

In general, the talks' mechanism was structured on four work teams: security arrangements, borders, Jerusalem, refugees. "We specifically started with the relatively easy things," says Barak, "territory and security arrangements. I thought to myself, if Arafat really intends to strike a deal, I must see some response to our concessions. Let's say not from the first concession, from 50% to 60%, but rather, from 80% to 85%. He doesn't say what he'll give in return. I'll give him that, but I want to understand if he understands what he won't get. And then there will be progress on both sides. Maybe not at the same pace, maybe not meeting exactly in the middle - but there is movement. An element of mutuality in a profound sense."

The teams are sitting separately and in the following order: first territory and definition of borders, then security arrangements, then Jerusalem and the refugee problem. But "for several days we are not making any progress," Barak says "as if each side is waiting. We're waiting for a reasonable Palestinian proposal, and the Palestinians are saying, if the Israelis wanted to come here, then they should give anything we think should be given."

Clinton realizes that matters are derailing and decides to work personally with the teams. "He himself took each area," says Barak, "and met with the teams of both sides."

Three days passed and nothing. That is - there was much talking and quite a bit of agreement, but in practical terms nothing, and a sense of crisis was in the air. After two days it was clear to Barak that the atmosphere was polite enough, but there was no progress. Each team worked separately and was supposed to concede something in order to reach a breakthrough. Each team was concerned about it looking as if the first concession came from its direction, everyone repeated their known positions, and the talks hit a bump in the road.

Clinton says to Barak that it is perhaps time that he, Barak, meet with Arafat. "I reminded him," says Barak "that Begin and Sadat also never met. In their case they lived in great friction. Nothing like the relationship between me and Arafat. Truth be told, Begin wasn't at the top of his game, but both sides had a genuine interest in sealing the deal. The people, from Dayan to Weizman to Aharon Barak, were all busy convincing Begin and preparing him for the large concessions. And even then it didn't work. It ended with Carter taking the papers and sitting with Osama El-Baz (Sadat's advisor) and with Aharon Barak on the legal texts and brought them to the parties and asked: who doesn't agree? And there too was a crisis and they threw everything out, but in that case there was after all an Arab leadership that was willing to take risks… even if it is true, knowledgeable parties would say that they understood they were going to get all of Sinai. I don't know exactly what happened there. Dayan and those close to him deny it. Tuhami (Dr. Hassan Tuhami. Sadat's deputy who met with Dayan in Morocco in '77) says that Dayan made a promise in Morocco; I don't know.

What I do know is that I need to steer our ship to safety and do it in the best way possible."

Already in the first meeting with Clinton at Camp David, in July of 1999, Barak shows him a map of 88%. "Look," Barak says to him, "I am sure they won't agree to this, but it is much more than Israel is willing to give, but see it as an illustration so you can understand that already at 58% there are big blocs - north of Jerusalem, a large one from its south - and this gives expression to the Palestinians' needs. If you need an illustration," Barak says to Clinton, "then here, see." Barak shows him a map, but "I didn't do any bargaining over percentage. Because then there was no point of it. But I was all the time careful," he says, "to say that we won't talk about less than 11.5%, because we can put 80% of the settlers in 11.5%. Shlomo (Ben-Ami) let them understand that we can also manage with 8%. He perceived this as a possibility of getting rid of tens of thousands of Palestinians in the 11%, but what do we get out of giving 11% and dying to separate from the Palestinians, we end up with another 200 thousand Palestinians in our settlement blocs. At the end of the day there are more Palestinians than Israelis in the blocs. But Shlomo let them understand we can get to that."

Now, that he's in the bind of the Camp David summit, Barak understands that "the Palestinians have a real feeling that they can only receive. They can give peace and good will, but they can only receive territory, and that's why they want to see maps…but they already saw maps, eight months ago, in the first meetings. At the beginning we sat among ourselves, spending a lot of time over illustrations of the blocs. Without the actual size. Then, ours sat and spoke, and later, already in Stockholm, Ben-Ami and Shahak presented the first map which was 66-14-20. Something like that. It means 66 to them, 14 for us and 20 that we postpone for several years. At some point we said, regarding the twenty - the disputed territory - that we would be willing to divide it according to the same proportion: let's say, one to seven or to eight, so they should be assured it can't be 70-30 and that down the road they'll get a portion of the twenty by the same division. In Stockholm I found them to be problematic and stuttering and we can't say that we knew for sure where they were aiming. Here at Camp David we are negotiating, and we are talking about all the parameters, and still I don't see any signs of real willingness. We even showed an unofficial illustration that says 'Sketch for Discussion'."

Barak is insistent about not meeting Arafat, and Clinton has no choice but to accept. "Okay, if not a meeting, then at least a map." He urges Barak to present a real map, and Barak authorizes Ben-Ami to present the 88-12 map (give or take a few percent either way) before the joint meeting of the Israeli and Palestinian borders teams, in the presence of Clinton, Albright and Sandy Berger, more or less the same map the Palestinians had already seen in Stockholm. It is now clear to everyone that the Israeli team is prepared to move, but this will happen only when it sees a move on the Palestinian side. The Palestinians look at the map and everything turns black. As far as they're concerned there are three cantons separated by Israeli-ruled strips of land, with the Jordan offered on a 99-year lease. All the mountain aquifers that control the water are under the sovereignty of the Israeli blocs of settlements, and you can

move from one canton to the other only through Israeli-ruled territory, that is - tight supervision on their movements and economy, and their air space is also under Israeli control.

After the map is set out Clinton comes for a work visit, to hear how things are going, and Abu Ala says to him that "there is nothing to talk about with such a map. First of all recognize the borders of July 4, 1967," he says to the Israelis and Americans, "and the implementation of Resolution 242." Clinton, who sees this map as a starting point is furious about this hard line and retorts: "You are not acting with integrity." He then breaks out in a barrage of reprimands and leaves slamming the door. In the nuances of the group dynamics of the enclosed camp, this outburst of Clinton enabled Abu Ala to be anti any agreement at the critical moments in which Arafat needed support - if he indeed wanted an agreement. From here on in Clinton decided to write the joint working paper himself, even though the Israeli delegation secretly heard that this paper had been prepared before Camp David. On the night of June 13 Barak received a copy of the paper. On June 14, a Friday, he convenes the team at ten am to correct items Clinton added at his own initiative, and is quite concerned: "We've fired almost all our ammunition, and have not yet received anything."

The Second Stage: Jerusalem, Going Once

The atmosphere at the camp is heavy. Clinton himself is showing signs of desperation and talks with Barak. Clinton suggests (the mediator is always the one who suggests): "Instead of four teams, one team of three people from each side, with each trio representing all of the topics and trying to offset the concessions on the different issues in order to move forward together." And so they sat for another several days. Although understandings on issues of security and territory were reached, in became clear that the main obstacle to moving forward was the Jerusalem problem.

Yossi Ginosar believed that negotiations about Jerusalem had never really been open for discussion before Camp David because Barak thought, rightly, according to Ginosar, that Jerusalem can only be discussed in a summit setting. Because it will immediately get out.

The next day, Monday July 17, Barak convenes all the delegation for the dramatic discussion about the future of Jerusalem. The ground wasn't completely set, even as far as Barak was concerned, but he had no choice if he wanted to come to Camp David with open options and without pressure, bordering on panic, from the right. "Hason and I know the topic," he says "Gili knows the topic pretty well, but all the other don't. Shlomo also isn't familiar with the details. I know of facts that Gili is exposed to regarding the Holy Basin, and there were several other circles. While still in Israel I tell them to meet with Ruth Lapidoth, and from time to time I too meet with academics who focus on Jerusalem-related topics, but I do not hold formal discussions intentionally and I forbid them to do so. Oded Eran very much wanted to deal with this in the first stage and I tell him, don't deal with Jerusalem." Later on,

when things really warm up on the practical level, Barak calls in Reuven Merhav, former senior Mossad official and research fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies to present his suggestion for dividing the city between Jews and Arabs.

At that same dramatic meeting everyone speaks in a tone of serious consideration and restrained formality: some are speaking directly to the minister of history, some to heart of the local neighborhood branch of their party, but ultimately the responsibility is Barak's alone - a responsibility that exceeds the success of this summit by far. Each of the summit participants has a different level of awareness of the potential for international conflagration hiding at the heart of the discussion about Jerusalem. Not only are the Muslim fanatics the concern of some of the participants, but also the Jewish fanatics and Jewish fanaticism. Everyone is aware of the seeds of calamity lying in the soil of the holy war.

In '74, two men, Dan Be'eri and Yeshua Ben-Shushan, began planning the plot to blow up the Dome of the Rock in order to remove the symbol of Muslim control of the Temple Mount. These are not just nutters, but two of the pillars of the Jewish Underground whose people are today the pillars of the Yesha Council, and their passion hasn't waned over the years. Only after '82, after the withdrawal from Sinai, Yesha extremists understood that the danger of general withdrawal from the Land of Israel, not only the earthly land but also the heavenly land, was lying in their wait, and the crisis of the withdrawal from Sinai led the plan to blow up the Dome of the Rock to practical phases. The reason for the operation, according to Yehuda Etzion, leader of the Underground and today a senior politico in Yesha, is: "the presence of the abomination (the Dome of the Rock, R.A.) on the site of the Holy of the Holies is the source of the spiritual corruption among the People of Israel." Etzion, who had trained as a military sapper, joined the two but didn't have enough experience and invited Menachem Livni (also senior in Yesha today) who studied engineering and served in the Engineering Corps to join the group and it was the latter who began planning the bombing. They considered the option of bombing from the air (one of them, Henman, was a pilot), but eventually decided on a ground explosion. They slowly collected the intelligence and materials, and because this was a big operation, there were 24 in the group, most of who progressed to the Jewish Underground terrorist attacks. But at this stage they intend in all seriousness to blow up the Dome of the Rock. Dan Be'eri, a righteous convert (*ger tzedek*), wore priest's clothing, toured the mosque's yard and measured the distances between the pillars supporting the Dome. Livni had already planned the tanks and the type of explosive that would be inserted. They then infiltrated an IDF base, stole and loaded the charges marked by Livni and got out of there. Some of the group began climbing and infiltration training, the path of entrance through the Golden Gate already marked, while Dan Henman, in Air Force uniform, purchased from a company that works with the Ministry of Defense Uzi guns and silencers. In the meantime the Underground carries out their lethal activities, including murderous gunfire in a crowded schoolyard and in '84 the *Shabak* arrests them moments before they blow up buses, with all their passengers, in Nablus. The plan to blow up the Dome of the Rock was set aside, but in the current days of the year 2000 the messianic craziness Yesha extremists are

saturated in is present and threatens to erupt the moment a hand is raised on Jerusalem. Head of the *Shabak* Avi Dichter says candidly to the government members: "Jewish extremists might strike at the Temple Mount."

Barak is aware of the background to the discussion and at this point of the negotiations he is prepared for anything: "it is possible that if we end the problem of Jerusalem, we will succeed in ending the conflict," he says stiffly to the party around him. He is aware of the consequences. Barak has his finger on the pulse of what is going on in Israel (a survey among immigrants from the FSU shows that between 60% and 90% are against any compromise regarding Jerusalem). A campaign sponsored by the Yesha Council PR team in *Vesti*, a Russian newspaper, talks about how "Barak's way may lead to a Rabinesque trauma".

At the same dramatic Camp David meeting about Jerusalem, he looks around and sees Dan Meridor. Meridor is supposed to signal to the public in Israel the right-wing mark, and says he is willing to accept the breach of no-division of Jerusalem, but wonders where the line will be drawn and stipulates his acceptance with a permanent agreement and maintaining Israeli sovereignty. Ben-Ami, Shahak and Gilead Sher speak as one about the demographic factor as a necessary motive for dividing the city, including sovereignty. Oded Eran also says that "we cannot reach an agreement without some Palestinian sovereignty in the Old City". Elyakim Rubenstein, wearing two hats - the one, the *kippah* on his head, the other, that of the Attorney General - offered, as usual, only half the goods: "we should aspire to include as few Arabs in Jerusalem and…to free ourselves of the villages surrounding Jerusalem." Amnon Lipkin was the most outspoken: "large parts of today's Jerusalem are not my Jerusalem." Israel Hason spoke about a special regime in the Old City, including limited activity of the Palestinian government and practical solutions such as transforming the problem area to an "archeological site". At this point Yossi Ginosar explains how he believes the Palestinians see the situation: "without Palestinian sovereignty there will be no agreement," and "the Palestinians don't completely understand the importance of the Temple Mount to the state of Israel and the Jewish People."

This is about the wish and general agreement to go for the division of Jerusalem, but it is clear that the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the place Rubinstein dubbed "the holiest place for the Jewish people", is a real problem, even though at this stage it still isn't clear how much of an impasse this is. According to archeological research, "under the Temple Mount there is a passageway from the Second Temple era, leading from the Huldah Gates into the temple plaza and four domes with Hebrew ornamenting were found." The archeological authenticity is unclear, but the religious one is saturated with explosives. Barak does not hesitate to place it on the table: "we can forgo the peripheral neighborhoods in return for the satellite towns, Maale Adumim, Givat Zeev… We have reached the conclusion," he says, "that as a matter of fact there is no agreement if we don't go beyond what we have thus far presented, come with or been willing to do… We will not concede sovereignty of the Temple Mount under which are the ruins of the Temple. This is the most important place to the Jewish people."

As it was, at the end of the day the discussion revolved around religious symbols, and once it was religious symbol versus religious symbol, fanatic rabbi versus fundamentalist sheikh, then Barak stood to the right of his religious symbol, even if he didn't believe in the God of the territories. Shlomo Ben-Ami later said:" I had never participated in such a significant discussion." Barak himself reckons that "this was a weighty and responsible discussion, in which everyone understood that without this we are destined to forever live on our sword. And with our eyes open wide we are moving toward a conflict that at first will be national and then religious and it will occur under very problematic security circumstances."

After almost five hours he sums up: "we have reached the moment of truth. We need to choose: history or politics. For us this is an essential question that touches upon the Jewish nature of the state. The solution in Jerusalem is based on long-term demographics and in this matter, time is working against us. The separation possible today will not be possible tomorrow."

There wasn't anyone in the room who did not understand the national and geographic significance. On the Camp David maps the concentrations of Palestinian population in Jerusalem were charted in a manner that left those who wanted to uphold the principle of Jewish majority little room to maneuver, when in the background, everyone knows that no state recognizes the annexation of East Jerusalem, or even the united city as the capital of the state of Israel. After the meeting disperses and each goes to his cabin, Barak calls Nava and tells her about the discussion about Jerusalem. "You won't believe it," she says to him, "right at this very moment you find me of the walls of the Old City, on the way to an event. I can see with my own eyes everything you are talking about."

The Third Stage: Clinton's Ideas

Following the group dynamics of the historic discussion, Barak meets with Clinton. On Tuesday, June 18, Clinton presents his plan to Arafat – including Jerusalem. Arafat says to him: "At Taba the Egyptians insisted and got every last meter, in Rajar in Lebanon there is a battle over every home, and I have to concede Jerusalem?"

Barak is aware of the fact that for several months the Vatican has been holding secret meetings about Jerusalem. Already at the end of January, a conference about the future of Jerusalem was convened in Rome. Representatives from most of the countries in Europe were there. The United States and Israel refrained, but the PLO sent a representative and it is clear that from here on in that the Holy See has more than just a wish to be involved in the process. What this means in Israeli consciousness is that not only is Islam threatening to steal away portions of Jewish control of Jerusalem, but also Christianity, and thousands of historical demons might rear their ugly heads.

In the days before Camp David, Barak, together with Beilin, makes an effort to obstruct the current crusade until things calm, but it is apparent that the cooperation between the Vatican and Christian Europe is today a powerful fact and part of the solution of the problem of Jerusalem. The more meticulous would say that Arafat

married a Christian in order to have a claim over the Christian sites and at Camp David he repeatedly claims to Clinton that he has spoken with "all the priests", and they are on his side. During Camp David the Americans check Arafat's claims about the Christian clergy who state unequivocally that this is not true. "After Camp David, when I examine Arafat's Christian pretensions," says Barak, "I'm told that Arafat is relying on a "Baba Shenouda", a Coptic Pope of sorts. When we checked with him he said, what do I care who's the landlord, you or them, it makes absolutely no difference to me."

The teams are locked behind the green walls of Camp David, but information about the extent of the concessions and the treatment of the Jerusalem issue leaked out and the wave that was waiting for a sign, awoke. Moshe Gaon reports to Barak that he hears that if there's an agreement, 3,000 cars are planned to blockade Route 1 (Jerusalem – Tel Aviv highway) as the opening event of the national offense. The Yesha Council tells of 100 thousand soldiers, and its people hurriedly add that the battle will be non-violent. An examination of these statements reveals that they have indeed collected signatures of thousands of people who have committed to volunteer for a month or two, without pay, in the battle against withdrawal. In a more thorough examination it becomes apparent that the state finances a majority of them anyway. On the other side, the left wing, headed by Sarid says that if there's no agreement, "we will bring down Barak".

The hunger strike encampment outside the Prime Minister's bureau has become a headquarters from which orders are given to block roads and for planning mass prayers at the Temple Mount. Rabbi Menachem Porush says that transferring the Arab neighborhoods to Arafat is *pikuach nefesh*. Justice Landau, former president of the Supreme Court said in a public interview that "Barak's concessions are a danger to the state". On a Yahoo! sponsored website an image of Hitler appeared with a caption, "Who will complete my work of annihilating the Jewish people"? Every few seconds the picture would fade into a picture of Barak in Nazi uniform, answering, "I will, Mein Fuehrer, I will join the Hamas and Jihad".

Barak is concerned about the wave of attacks and he calls to Camp David government secretary Yitzhak Herzog and Colette Avital to strengthen the spokespersonship team and the *hasbara* setup. The response of the Hamas was actually somewhat encouraging. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin said that "if Israel would withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Hamas would agree to a five-year armistice." The question is, of course, what happens after five years? *Beit Hillel* says that in five years' time there won't be any reason for war, *Beit Shamai* say that it's all a lie, it's only a phase on the way to annihilating Israel. Barak removes himself from both opinions, and as far as he's concerned he is Prime Minister whose job it is to demand an agreement for a permanent arrangement between states, with international backing.

And, in the meantime, the summit is wading in the issue of symbols of Palestinian nationalism in Jerusalem, with an eye toward the Temple Mount. At the entrance to the dining room at Camp David there's a foyer with a large wall clock that has stopped. Barak is somewhat drawn to it, trying to guess what the problem is. "If

that character Arafat will budge a millimeter," he says to Shlomo Ben-Ami who was standing next to him, "I commit to making this clock work."

The Palestinians are still defiant, and some of Clinton's aides are beginning to sway, even though Clinton himself is a consistent supporter of Israeli sovereignty of the Temple Mount. But the entire American bunch doesn't want to lose the summit, and ideas such as a Palestinian flag on the Temple Mount start floating about in the air. Barak understands there is no way he can pass an agreement with the Palestinian flag on Temple Mount. As far as he is concerned it is a matter of principle: "no Israeli Prime Minister will ever sign on transferring sovereignty, but thinking creatively we can reach a solution." At this point in the negotiations he drafts a sharp letter in which he says to Clinton, among other: "The fact that Israel is willing to assist in solving Palestinian distress and realize their rights is no reason to expunge the thousands-of-years-long affinity and prayers to the Temple Mount, or the sweat and blood of four generations of Zionism that fought for this place… Israel will not agree to any concession of the principle of sovereignty of the Temple Mount."

Yatom takes this text to Sandy Berger and Barak says to him, "read the letter to him word for word." Dennis Ross is sitting with Berger, and they are both offended. "I understand them, says Barak "they're all Jews and we're accusing them of abandoning the Jewish heritage."

What is this accusation? They say to Yatom, what is this harshness on the part of the Prime Minister?

Yatom returns to Barak, who shrugs his shoulders. "It was called for," he says to him. And indeed, the next day, a Sunday, when Clinton comes from church directly to a meeting with Barak and Arafat on the topic of Jerusalem, he says to Arafat: "If you think that this is an opportunity to erase the affinity of the state of Israel to the holy places, then there will be no agreement and we're wasting our time."

"He banged on the table," Barak describes what of the meeting that was reported, "Clinton says to Arafat, 'it's not only them, the Jews, who say, it is me, Clinton, who's telling you. I believe that under that area is the Jewish Temple.' And then he, the President of the United States, said to them: 'forget about the Israelis, I, Clinton, will tell you about the Jews and the Temple Mount. What did the priest talk about today in church?' He told Arafat, 'about Jerusalem, and where was he reading from? The New or Old Testament, and there it talks about your temple, the house of your Lord, and Solomon was also mentioned in the same sermon.' And Clinton continues: 'It is I who believes that the remnants of the Jewish temple are there.' One of the consultants, a Jew actually, leaned over and whispered in Clinton's ear: 'Mr. President, make it clear that this is your personal position and not the government's stand'".

Even after that conversation Barak did not sense any progress on the part of the Palestinians: "I said that at this point how the discussion about Jerusalem with the Palestinian ends isn't very important if we can't even see initial signs of progress on their end. It won't be an agreement if there aren't bricks on each of the sides, and that has nothing to do with the issue of Jerusalem. My impression that their intentions

aren't sincere is getting stronger. And what matter is it if I like this reality or not – and I don't like it at all – it is the reality."

The situation as perceived by Barak at this stage was that the younger team members, Dahlan, Rashid, Asfur and maybe Erekat, wanted a settlement. "Arafat hesitated, he pondered – he wanted more, so he could justify a concession, but the more veteran, Abu Ala and Abu Mazen, and Akram Haniya recoiled. They understood that he, Arafat, was not backing them up. He's not saying to them, I'm going to make a historic decision and you Moishe (Sharet) and you (Eliezer) Kaplan support me. He wanted them to complete the negotiations for him and then to decide. It's not that he said to them I've decided to sign an agreement, go seal the deal, and tomorrow afternoon we'll sign. He wanted them to discuss first. That Abu Ala will discuss Jerusalem and the refugees, that Abu Mazen will discuss security, that they assert their full weight and say it's okay, that it is possible to go with it and then they will be those responsible and so it will be registered in the people's consciousness. And then, if he doesn't agree on the basis of what they brought to him – he hasn't dirtied his hands, he isn't responsible, he hasn't taken a risk and the one who will be murdered in Gaza will be Abu Mazen, not him."

When Barak reports about the situation of the Palestinian delegation, he reckons that "his guys read better than us the signs that he is hesitant and wants them at the front. And then if there are parts of an agreement he might disseminate them or release sections, or send one of them to talk with the Saudis and Egyptians and see the responses when he hasn't yet given his word and he feels like he is doing difficult, heavy and dangerous things. But at the end of the day, when it comes to making the decision, I see that he's not built like Sadat."

* * *

In one of their meetings, Mubarak told Barak about Sadat's decision making process before traveling to Jerusalem: "Sadat convened his high level people and simply told them, no discussions or consultations, that we're going to sign a peace treaty (the agreement, by the way, was signed two years later, in '79). The entire leadership panicked, stuttered, but in its own way made its objection known. Mubarak, who was Vice President and number two, also wasn't in agreement with the decision and suggested to first go to Assad. Firstly, that Assad shouldn't say we went behind his back, and secondly, Mubarak was convinced that the suggestion or journey would lead to elimination of the initiative. Sadat looked him in the eyes and said: 'Hosni, that's an excellent idea.' And they go to Damascus and Sadat eventually decides alone that he's going to Jerusalem. And they all, those גמאסים, are peeing in their pants. That's what leadership does. Simply goes to Jerusalem. But Arafat is not cut from the same cloth, or not strong enough for making decisions at this time, and you can say about him that adheres to the principles of the revolution, but he's not taking personal responsibility for this principle."

Barak is aware of the fact that Sadat left for Jerusalem under the assumption that he'll get every last centimeter, but in this case Arafat knows that there isn't a

reality in which he can get every last centimeter on any issue, and yet he knows he can get a real state. In Oslo Arafat circumvented this problem of personal responsibility, according to Barak, because on "the deep level they got a great deal and weren't requested to give anything. That is why they somehow managed to give a commitment that according to their code could be interpreted in more than one way. See the story of the *hudna* from the days of Muhammad, where the prophet himself broke a promise he gave, because the sanctity of the Islam is stronger than the promises of humans."

Barak recalls that at the times of Oslo he used to ask Yitzhak Rabin time and again why he kept conceding a portion, "and he used to say to me: 'Ehud, we have more margins. Let's see what happens and if it doesn't follow this outline then we'll have points at which to think.' But now I'm Prime Minister at the point at which we have to give answers, and there is no more leeway at these points. Period."

For this reason Arafat would indeed invoke the memory of Rabin from time to time during Camp David, and Barak believes that "after his death, Rabin was mythologized by the Palestinians. Arafat's emotional attitude toward him doesn't seem faked. In retrospect, all the wishes and dreams, including those that Rabin in his life could not have fulfilled, were associated with the assassinated Rabin. He created a collegiality of sorts. In a conversation between Clinton, Arafat and me in Oslo, he hinted to us, 'Rabin took a chance and he's gone, and I too am taking a chance. Indeed, I will be killed.'"

"I am the only one of the three who's putting himself at risk." Barak reckons there.

"You'll be ousted, but I'll be killed," Arafat said decisively.

Barak fought back: "Rabin was killed, Sadat was killed," trying to convey a covert message: Rabin led, Sadat led. He didn't wait. Mubarak was the only one who supported him. But Arafat didn't pick up on the message. And Barak continued and said to him: "we haven't heard about any Palestinian being killed because he was pro peace." And Arafat is adamant: "I'll be killed."

"Afterwards I heard," Barak tells "that he also explained to Mubarak that this was why he isn't making progress. I said to Mubarak, who's going to kill him? I've seen Sadat killed for peace, I saw Rabin killed for peace, Hussein's grandfather was killed because of peace, I haven't seen some Palestinian killed… maybe Sartawi (Issam, a PLO activist who held talks with Israelis in the early eighties and was killed by Abu Nidal people). But the truth is that at Camp David Arafat was frightened, and he didn't have people around him to support him."

Arafat saw Barak, among other, as the reason why he didn't have people that he would have liked to seen at his side. "At the height of tensions at Camp David," Barak recounts, "Arafat used to let it out that there were two people he could have worked with: Abu Iyad and Abu Jihad. Barak killed Abu Jihad and Abu Nidal killed Abu Iyad. It implied, look who I'm left with. With those who don't possess the mental powers to charge. But what can we do, the two, Abu Ala and Abu Mazen, understand that when he says to them be with me and not behind me and when I decide say yes,

and he intends to send them to the front, that they should make the concessions and negotiate, while he can always retreat and check the field." Besides that, Barak believes that "when Arafat complains that Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad are not with him, it isn't the heart of his claim. It's a way to signal three things simultaneously: (1) that he is a leader of willingness, that is - look how much suffering I've endured and I alone remain from the trio; (2) also a way to lightly sting Abu Ala and Abu Mazen and hint to them that they are not the same; (3) to hint at the Americans, look at the difficulties I have on my home court. This is Arafat at his best, living in the land of atmosphere and not in the land of decisions, and his real dialogue is with history and Israel."

But beyond these observations, Barak believes he understands why they're moving back and forth: "There are, in the background, preparations for the battles of succession."

But at Camp David Arafat is only 70 years old. His average work day is 18 hours long, and he swallows the world whole in two or three bites, as if he were hopping from room to room at home. His physician, Prof. Ashraf El-Kurdi, a neurologist from Amman, says that despite the tremor of his lips he is 'fine', or perhaps this is how doctors to leaders speak. In any event, he has already worn out five Israeli Prime Ministers, and if Barak doesn't seal the deal and doesn't want to be another nick on his pistol's handle, he should decide whether he charges at him, not physically but at the Authority, hoping that those who come after him will conduct themselves differently - or whether to wait for nature or human nature to take its course. "As far as I'm concerned," Barak says, "I'm willing to negotiate with the Hamas," but he actually means Arafat's successors.

According to the Intelligence Branch's assessments, the pyramid under him includes a close layer, who is Muhammad Qurei (Abu Ala), head of the legislative council which is the Palestinian Parliament; and Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), who without official title is considered Arafat's deputy - both Tunis veterans, both came under Abu Jihad who was killed by Israel, and Abu Iyad who was killed by Abu Nidal. After them stand Muhammad Dahlan, head of the Palestinian Preventive Security Forces in Gaza, and Jibril Rajub in the West Bank. Underneath them a whole bunch with no identifiable leadership potential. The only opposition is Farouk Kaddoumi, who was against Oslo, who does not belong directly to Arafat's operation and has an independent budget. But Barak admits that in those days "Arafat is still the symbol, he is the code and he is the commentator of Palestinian nationalism and he is the one to talk with."

Before the summit Barak checks how Arafat works under his own inner constraints, in the same manner that he and the Israeli delegation work under theirs, and the way to do this is to see how he responds to suggestions. "Already before Camp David I said that when I see the first movements on their part, we can take bigger steps. I wanted to hear something simple: that they should say, we understand that we won't have one hundred percent of the territory, and we will recognize some of the territory as settlement blocs. No matter the size, I wanted to hear agreement regarding the principle. I didn't hear it. Even if they had said 3%, I would have seen

this as an opening for real negotiations. Peres said at cabinet meetings, 'I know from senior Palestinians that we can seal a deal for eighty-twenty with them.' He said this at the stage in which we started with forty-one hundred. We said forty-one, they said one hundred. Later on we said that it is clear to us that there will be more than fifty, you want a clue? It is clear that you will have more than 50% of the territory, maybe 10% immediately if the framework agreement is successful, and this is part of the process. Later on, when things progressed, they said, 'we want to see maps.' And throughout this process Arafat never said anything. What makes it harder to figure out the picture on the other side is the fact that there is something I call a different culture of negotiations. On our end when on the way to the bathroom, the number eight person on the delegation mumbles something to a passing Palestinian that sounds like Israel is open to one concession or another, for them, the concession is already a done deal. It doesn't matter at all what is said at the table or what the Prime Minister says - in their eyes it's done. On their side even when the delegation's number one, appointed by the Chairman, formally sitting at the head of the table, at a formal and documented meeting, and he says something that can be perceived as a concession; when it gets to Arafat, he can cancel it as if it were nothing, as we've already seen on stage at the actual signing of the agreement in Cairo."

In general, throughout Camp David Barak is concerned about the fact that this is negotiation is actually a meeting of two cultures that are also different cultures of negotiation: "Uri Sagi can move forward on the margins even without me telling him exactly what to say, and in our culture it's not too terrible, especially when we tell them in advance that nothing is accepted unless everything is agreed and signed."

The negotiation is still about percentages. Yossi Ginosar, who would go there and back, says to Barak that Arafat cannot agree to anything less than something around the 100%, perhaps something just under one hundred, but in any case not something that will be perceived as just over 90%. Barak prodded: "You can say for certain that we can close with them at ninety-four/six?"

The way Ginosar perceived Arafat's logic was that the odds of conceding the right of return in negotiations with Israel could only be possible if the Palestinian side is fully satisfied regarding territory and Jerusalem. Ginosar thought, and shared with Barak, that tactically, anyone who wants to achieve 96% or 98%, won't begin negotiations around 60%, but at 92%. To present Barak with the real picture of the Palestinian position, Ginosar initiated, about one month before Camp David, a secret meeting between Barak and Abu Mazen, at the Prime Minister's Residence in Jerusalem. At this meeting Barak heard directly the Palestinian stand on the territorial issue, as well as Arafat's reservations about the very existence of the summit at Camp David.

But Barak stands firm with his resolve to push Arafat up against the wall, confronting him with the need to show his hand while the Israelis do the same with American backing. He doesn't take the positions of the envoys and mediators too seriously, and doubts his own ability to understand Arafat's true intentions.

"Even if I myself were to pick up the phone to Arafat," Barak says "or meet with him, I wouldn't get an answer. Indeed, it's much easier for him to talk with someone else because it's less committing."

Six months before Camp David Peres reported to Barak's cabinet that he knows that there is a most senior Palestinian leader who told him that the deal can be sealed at eighty-twenty. Barak says: "Those are just words," and now, at Camp David he sees once again that he was right. At that time Haim Ramon comes to him too and tells him he has spoken with Dahlan and Rashid and they're telling him 70-20-10, that the deal can be sealed with this formulation (70 for them, 10 for us and 20 to be decided upon in the future). Barak charges Ginosar with the task of finding out if Peres or Ramon's formulations are acceptable to Arafat, and Ginosar returns with an absolute negative response. Barak cancelled him out then: "Those were just baits tossed at you along the road. At most it binds whoever says them at that same moment. It certainly doesn't commit Arafat. That's why I constantly strived to learn if the Chairman agrees not to receive one percent of the territory and that it should be ours. But at no point during the talks was it possible to get an actual answer to that question."

The Fourth Stage: Barak with Dahlan and Rashid

Yossi Ginosar asks him to sit with Muhammad Rashid, Arafat's financial counselor, and with Muhammad Dahlan, head of the Preventative Security Forces, in order to describe to them the possible solution in Jerusalem, and he consents. Dahlan says to Barak: "We need a divan, a place to host, so we have somewhere to put up the guest, as we won't talk in the street."

"Is it important?" Barak asks.

"It changes the picture," Dahlan responded.

"What I understood from this," says Barak, "was, that if we succeed here in reaching an agreement about the finality of the issue, then there's a point in talking. If there's a possibility, then okay, so I've sat with them and I describe the following picture to them: Arafat greeting a guest from Saudi Arabia at the airport in Qalandiya, where he has his own terminal, his own VIP in a joint airport. At Qalandiya there's a joint runway and a Palestinian zone. The guest lands in Palestine, just as those who come to Switzerland land in Geneva, takes a limousine and drives through a 300 million dollar tunnel road, on to the 'highway', a bridge over Wadi Joz and inside the hill under Mt. Scopus, arriving directly at the Lions' Gate, and all the way is under Palestinian sovereignty and he doesn't see even one Israeli soldier along the way. 'All yours,' I said to Dahlan, 'and inside the Old City compound you manage your internal affairs as agreed and we have sovereignty of our nation's holinesses."

Dahlan responded immediately: "Don't go organizing tunnels and bridges for us, that can't be the connection between Jerusalem and the West Bank."

"Arafat," Barak says, "creates a mirror image of what we say about free access to Haram al-Sharif and he is willing to give us free access to the Western Wall, and it is clear that on this matter there will be no compromise, and Arafat knows this too."

According to Ginosar, Arafat is certain that on matters related to the Western Wall he is being historically generous. “I myself have heard from him in the past,” says Barak “three different stories about his attitude toward the Wall. When at my home he spoke at length about his childhood near the Wall. He was in the Moroccan Quarter and his grandmother had an apartment there and he would spend long hours watching the Jews pray while his grandmother called him from upstairs.” One time he told Barak that he himself, Arafat and his family “have property in the vicinity of the Wall” (he means the Moroccan Quarter that was razed to create the Wall’s plaza. R.A.). “You don’t have to tell me about your affinity to the Wall,” Arafat says to Barak, “I know it. I've seen you cry and have observed you when you go there.” Barak isn’t certain that the story is correct, but as far as he’s concerned it’s a metaphor, as if he's telling you: “The Wall is mine not only on a national level, but also on an individual, personal, real estate level.”

“His deep attitude toward the Wall is that of landlord and host. As such, he's willing to host you politely, but he doesn’t acknowledge that this is our home. It’s a story that serves his purpose and in it he says ‘who like me knows that you are not the real owners in terms of real estate’.” Barak muses and adds: “I can't say that I don’t understand how this serves him. I don’t want it and I don’t like it, but it’s there, a fact of nature, and I can't ignore it; but our mission is to protect Israel’s vital interests until the conflict ends and you can't do that without a modicum of understanding of the other side. If you can't understand the Palestinian nuances, then you have no chance of making any progress. On the other hand, as far as I’m concerned, there is no concession regarding our sovereignty of the Western Wall.

“The Palestinians asked the Americans what do they even want on the Temple Mount?” Barak recounts, “What’s their story?”

They were told that Temple’s remnants are under the Temple Mount. The Palestinian group responded with reluctance. They didn’t buy that. “There’s a difference,” says Barak, “between Arafat saying I want to have a presence in the sovereignty, and I will not settle for occupation, and between him trying to erase the Jewish history. At the UN’s millennial General Assembly Arafat said that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Palestine. As far as I know, Jesus,” Barak says, “was a Jew, and when he went to Jerusalem he didn’t see any mosques. Not even churches. What he saw was only the Herodian Jewish Temple.”

Barak can see that on the symbolic level, the level of emotions, no one will reach a decision as both sides feel a deep, i.e., a religious affinity and the only way to decide is on a practical level. “Practically, above ground, no one wants to stop and change the situation in which there are mosques and freedom of ritual and it is agreed on both sides, each for their own reasons, that digging underground is not allowed, so we’re left with the symbolic level. We said that we’ll go for a formulation that expresses our affinity and doesn’t erase the Jewish history, while they are actually, in practice, maintaining their religious life on the Mount without any problems.”

Dahlan and Rashid, according to Barak, sounded satisfied and went to Arafat but returned crestfallen. It turns out that Arafat is not satisfied with this and wants all the quarters plus the Old City, otherwise, they say to the Israelis, we have Palestinian

ghettos in the heart of Jerusalem. In terms of the negotiations this means going back to square one.

"I wanted to understand," says Barak, "if there is anything in Jerusalem that if offered by us will pass Arafat. My impression is - mine, not others' - that if he had his flag, the Palestinian flag in the Old City, not on the Temple Mount, but say on a large guest house where he receives guests in the Old City and not in Abu Dis, the feeling is that even if he gets a hold on the Temple Mount it's done - and sure enough, that didn't work either."

* * *

Following these talks the entire summit found itself once again in a Jerusalem dead end and Barak was stuck at the point in which "the state of Israel has contractually committed to deal with the problem of Jerusalem". Despite a distinct gut feeling that the summit is on the road to nowhere, he doesn't give up and is ready for contending even at the cost of understanding the other side, which is a big deal where we come from. "We have an interest in understanding their reality," he says, "but there is also awareness to the fact that it isn't dependent on us only. Therefore, at Stockholm too, and mainly at Camp David, I told them: you want an arrangement that includes a motif of postponing some of the issues for some time? We don't like it very much but are willing to discuss it. Gili (Shear) and Shlomo (Ben-Ami) bring it up. But they weren't interested in postponing." Now they're stuck at Camp David with the problem of Jerusalem and the issue of postponement is brought up explicitly by the Americans. "They say, let's think about two possibilities. Let's postpone the issue of all Jerusalem for a year or two and the Old City for five years." The Israeli delegation "is to consider, and then," Barak says, "the Americans came with a new attempt. Let's postpone the dispute over the Holy Basin for ten years and in the meantime leave a freeze frame of the situation as is. Anyone can claim whatever they want. And in the meantime you, the Palestinians, control in practice the prayers up top and the Israelis claim it's their sovereignty."

The Fifth Stage: "Not Me"

On the whole, Barak was willing to consider a situation in which the Palestinians will be given the management in practice of the area above ground and the mosques without any interference, more or less the same as the current situation, and that we will have overall sovereignty. On the Temple Mount he was willing to accept an arrangement called "Sovereignty of the Lord", and from conversations held in the past, he has Abdallah and Mubarak's hesitant support of the idea: "Abdallah told me his father was pro this. Mubarak told me it's an excellent idea but Arafat needs to agree." But neither are urging Arafat to agree. "…things aren't fully defined here," Barak says, "the entire reality flows much more blurry and vague. No one says anything defined to anyone. The Saudis, the Moroccans, the Jordanians aren't saying

what their opinion is about the sovereignty of the lord or any other proposition. Everyone, like Mubarak, says we don't answer for the Palestinians. This doesn't happen either when the head of the CIA meets privately with King Fahd and urges him on this matter, because Fahd understands that he's documenting the meeting, or taping or writing with one hand, like Arafat. The most Fahd is willing to give in his conversation with Tenet is to tell him that if the Palestinians agree, then we'll agree too."

The question is how much leeway are the Arab leaders giving Arafat to reach his own decision, and as it seems at Camp David, they won't lead him to compromises. "Why should they? Tomorrow Arafat will point an accusing finger at them and say, 'they conceded sovereignty of the Temple Mount.' So everything is much dimmer and more blurry than the newspaper headlines."

Arafat didn't fail alone in the great test of leadership. All the Arab leaders and his own consultants left him to deal alone with the story of Jerusalem and Haram al-Sharif. Even Clinton's approaches to Mubarak and Abdallah during Camp David didn't move them from the position of observer. Now, with Arafat standing there alone, it is apparent how heavy the implicit weight of the Arab and Muslim world is when strumming the sensitives strings of Middle Eastern style violent holiness. Other than Arafat, Jerusalem has rightful fathers every which way you look: Muhammad VI King of Morocco is chairman of the Al-Quds Committee; Fahd King of Saudi Arabia is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques"; President of Iran Muhammad Khatami is also president of the "Islamic World Committee"; and King Abdallah II King of Jordan is "Custodian of the Jerusalem Holy Sites until otherwise agreed" (this is the language of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, signed by Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein, father of Abdallah). The biggest of them all is Hosni Mubarak, representing the largest Arab state in the Muslim world who cannot renounce the Jerusalem problem because of his internal situation in the face of radical Islam. Yasser Arafat himself is deputy chairman of the Islamic Jerusalem Committee and he repeatedly reminds of the fact, telling Clinton directly: "A billion Muslims will not forgive me."

As for the negotiations themselves, "Shlomo Ben-Ami went toward them on the issue of Jerusalem and spoke about some of the eastern neighborhoods being in their possession and others governed jointly. Even after all these they didn't reach an agreement simply because they want more. What we discovered at Camp David was that the Palestinian demands run deeper than we had hoped. More extreme than our assessments. Even Beilin, who sat with them for hours, days and nights, didn't gauge this extremism."

While the Palestinians know through the Americans and from direct talks what Barak's intentions regarding Jerusalem are, Barak is waiting in his cabin, refusing to see Arafat until he understands what he's aiming for: "I didn't know what they would decide. I thought that they might agree and if they didn't agree then we haven't lost out on anything because we came in good will and that is a great point to our benefit.

If they agree it'll be hard, but we'll deal with it. If not - we are willing to postpone the issue of Jerusalem."

The one who is unwilling to postpone the issue of Jerusalem is Arafat. "Their explanation is interesting," says Barak, "they said - we know what postponing is. When India was established and Pakistan postponed the arrangement regarding Kashmir for six months, in the years since then both sides have armed themselves with nuclear bombs, there have been three wars, hundreds of thousands died and the situation hasn't changed since the agreement was postponed then.

"In parallel to the problematics of Jerusalem and its subsidiaries, Gidi Grinstein and the American lawyer Leonard Schwartz attempt to prepare a formulation of the framework agreement, so if we have a 15-page document and they might be prepared to sign it, or if it includes few issues in parenthesis, and among the pages are an Israeli version and a Palestinian version, then we can sit on it and start cutting out. There were all kinds of beginnings in the document: refugees, security and other topics, but we never reached a point at which the other side says that's it, we have a decision. Never. If there were such a point we would have sensed it, and there's no problem sensing something like that when it exists."

And still, Arafat is adamant in his refusal to progress on the topic of Jerusalem, which at the moment is the key to any progress.

From here on in Barak is much more decisive in understanding Arafat: "The problem was what would be the boundary we reach in discussion with Arafat. Nothing specific was really agreed upon, but it was clear that without willingness to give them some of the outer neighborhoods of Jerusalem so he could say he got part of 'so called' sovereign Jerusalem, but that too wasn't enough. And it returns to the same pattern."

Again, stagnation, that is - people calmly moving around from here to there, somewhere an invisible clock ticks dramatically, and all await the step, or the layup strategy, of the leader who will take responsibility, break forward and dunk the ball in the basket. Even the attempt to create a meeting technique that would result in such a leadership move did not bear fruit.

The negotiation technique according to Barak was discussion in the teams and an attempt to sum up everything possible and come with the differences to the leaders: "We negotiated very intensively. But this intensity - which was supposed to stimulate both sides, to warm to them and give them the a sense of opportunity on the one hand and a sense of the price if we don't go with it, on the other hand - didn't lift off from the stage of discussions to the stage of recognition and compromise on both sides, to be followed by a final draft. There were many discussions, and if you talk to Shlomo Ben-Ami he'll say that at certain points it seemed to him pretty close, and I say that it didn't get to the stage where in the overall balance Arafat looks at the picture and says 'that's it, there's going to be an agreement, I'm not saying this to anyone, but I'm beginning to operate under the assumption that we need to reach an agreement. I will demand everything from Clinton, but in the end I'll make the decision.' It changes the tone, you feel that experienced people have no problem understanding that we have

reached the stage where we seal the deal. But they didn't get there. The stage of contacts between the parties seemed to me like another seminar. Even less than Stockholm. There we reached understandings about what we could achieve. If in Stockholm Ben-Ami would have felt that nothing would come of it, we wouldn't have gone to Camp David, but he had a strong feeling that there was where to progress to. Only in retrospect the Palestinians said that had they given more in Stockholm, they would have moved forward there - because they need that excuse in facing the world in order to throw the load on us."

At this point Clinton asks to turn the discussions into an Israeli position paper. Once paper is involved Barak says "that's it." In fact, the Americans are bringing into the camp experienced lawyers specializing in interstate contracts and Barak's senses are heightened. But he cannot prevent Clinton from promoting an American position paper, even if he doesn't see a real chance of its implementation. The American paper refers to opening positions for negotiations, assuming that the Palestinians know they must respond in order to get to what everyone in fact knows. It discusses 650 km for settlement blocs without territorial exchange; division of sovereignty in Jerusalem based on demographic distribution as agreed at the summit; and a non-disputable right to sovereign access to prayers on Temple Mount. There is no mention of the right of return to the Green Line, except for two thousand refugees per year in the framework of family reunification and humanitarian gestures, and agreement on the summaries of the security committee that reached joint security arrangements, with the exception of a bridgeable gap regarding the Jordan Valley.

"As far as I'm concerned, the moment Clinton demanded a paper with our position and it was clear to me that he would show it to the Palestinians, then I had no problem to harden our position, even when on the 18th of the month Clinton receives our counter paper and accuses us of not budging. But I didn't take it too seriously because I reckon that he said the same to the other side, and I hear from our people that the Americans are not at all satisfied and as understood from Sandy Berger, even Clinton is not happy with the fact that our paper moves back. But it retracts from the suggestions made orally and all the logic that I've explained from day one that we cannot document and put anything in writing until we know where we're heading."

Barak aims to exhaust his national responsibility, but on the other hand, people expect him and Arafat to cooperate much like two boxers who fall into each other's' arms at the end of a tiring round. If not for love then because of the fatigue - that human spark that goes beyond the political, legal and historical honing of swords - to simply sit down and talk to each other in order to get to the most simple level of the conflict: enough already with this asininity. The whole world is watching us as we sit and talk, so let's wrap this up and move forward using each other's strength.

As time passed, all the summit participants - Palestinians, Israelis and Americans - had a gnawing feeling that the origin of this disruption lies in the fact that the two leaders are not sitting face to face alone and bringing this to an end. Ginosar spoke with Arafat, who immediately agreed. Barak refused: "This is not a battle

between me and Arafat,' says Barak, "as a leader, he acts on behalf of his people. That's legitimate. He has his team at his disposal. My sign and Clinton's sign that he is serious is not that I meet with him in some magic meeting, or that Clinton will speak with him as people do and he'll suddenly give everything and say that there's an agreement. But that his teams, on the different topics, are not showing signs of movement. What is the willingness to talk really about? Never mind for a moment which parameter we're discussing. Let us assume that our position is here and yours is there. We are willing to go here and in negotiations you need to know that he is willing to move - not the same let's say, but a tenth of the distance we've moved - but when all this time I've said what I'm prepared to give and they say what they're not prepared to receive, what's the point of talking with Arafat? All this time I've been searching for signs of progress and I haven't found any. If you can see these signs only on some of the parameters, when they happen lower down, you understand we're moving toward something. At a certain moment, in every place an unwritten agreement was stopped. The sense people communicated from lower down was that 'it's okay, don't panic about us progressing slowly, we intend on reaching an agreement. We're wrapping up the details.' And when one side is hit, you take a step back. This is what I was looking for and never found. They're sophisticated enough not to stumble and are trying to create a situation in which they release balloons. Formulations. Arafat's people say: 'We're not saying that we won't agree to anything under any circumstances, but we want you to give us a map and your proposal is not enough.' And the maps were never enough for them. When we arrived at Camp David we were willing to show them maps in which there were 88%, and we got nothing in return, when it was clear to them that there will be blocs of settlements. Even if they're the size of only a few percent each. For that there's no point sitting with Arafat…"

Despite the dynamics of the internal discussion at Camp David, Barak must at all times remain focused on the big picture, on the power games in Israeli society and on that elusive thing called the foundation of faith and inner strength of a nation. "… there are settlements," he says, "that cannot be uprooted without irreparably damaging the state of Israel's self-image and inner strength. We don't deserve that. After all, our battle isn't against the wishes of the Palestinians. Their wish is to see us spill into the sea. The question is always in relation to the international desire. Nothing will satisfy them, unless it appears like surrender, and leadership has to always stand on that fine line on which you are prepared to go far enough in order to get to a reasonable place, even if it is objectively very painful to you, but particularly if it is reasonable in the eyes of the relevant observers who are the centers of power in the world. Even though 11 Jewish neighborhoods, with 150 thousand residents, that lie east to the Green Line in Jerusalem, the old line, are formally like settlements, practically no one in the world thinks anyone will remove them from there. That alone, for example, is worth one percent or three quarters of a percent. There are blocs of settlements, such as Gush Etzion that was actually ours and seized by the Legion in '48, and each of the topics is sensitive. What is needed is daring - the willingness to go far, real consideration, not of any convention of thought, of what state security really is in the

comprehensive and broad sense. After all, at the end of the day we were willing to consider far reaching things: an independent Palestinian state with small limitations resulting directly from our security needs, with a connection between the West Bank and Gaza running through our sovereignty, with exits to Egypt and Jordan and the entire world - a demilitarized state, but with commercial relations and economic agreements with Israel, recognized by the whole world, with borders, situated on all the territory except for a very few percent. We have the blocs of settlements, greater Jerusalem plus security arrangements, a peace treaty and resolution of the conflict - no small goal to try and achieve. Even with the security arrangements, where they were prepared for certain flexibilities, their way was not to say we agree, rather not to raise reservations. They heard from us that the Jordan Valley had to be a security zone that enables us deployment and they didn't respond. That way it wasn't possible to understand what they do agree to and as far as we were concerned there was still a hope that we can close on topics that will build a commitment to an agreement."

As the talks continued to sink deeper into the familiar swamp, the pressure on Barak to meet Arafat grew stronger. Most members of the delegation said to Barak, sit with him, and Barak repeatedly refused. "Technically, we saw each other quite a lot. After all, I met with him every evening. But I kept being asked why don't you meet with Arafat for real talks, and I explained time and again that there's no point in speaking with Arafat and sharing your positions with him before it is clear to you that there is an agreement. Because anything you say, he'll take and say it's mine and you still have nothing to show for it. And to meet purposelessly is aimless because we're not men of manners and etiquette. After all, I speak with Arafat every day at dinner, but not about the 'nitty-gritty'. Clinton speaks with him about the 'nitty-gritty' more than I do and then tells me what he says, and I suppose he tells Arafat what I say. The general line is that he can't be budged. He is stubborn. Concerned. Scared. He says it's dangerous for him, that he can't do more, that the Israelis show their hand first. He doesn't say to Clinton 'no, I'm not willing to discuss.' He always said to Clinton, 'I've given up already, I can't any more, they should make an offer.' And when he's shown our proposal he says, 'it's not enough. It won't pass.'"

At the end of the day Yossi Ginosar volunteered to take action and looking back it was the longest conversation Barak and Arafat held, even if it was of no significance in terms of a breakthrough. Barak wasn't very keen on going but accompanied Ginosar. On their way they learned that Arafat was delayed at Clinton's, and Barak immediately say to Ginosar: "Okay, we can postpone this," but Ginosar who had almost determined a fact doesn't let him get away and while they wait Arafat calls from Clinton's cabin to say he's running late and asks that they wait for him. Abu Mazen sits with them for part of the time and the meeting was "very pleasant". Barak and Ginosar smoked cigars, drank coffee, there were snacks (nuts and seeds) on the table, but the conversation (in English) wasn't about anything consequential.

They called each other *Rais* and *Prime Minister*. Ehud inserts words in Arabic from time to time. Big shot small talk. Ginosar translates here and there. Fluent social

discourse, including humorous comments about the region and that's all. Parted cordially and each returned to their positions.

Barak ("I always assume someone's listening in") tells that indeed, "I sat with Arafat in the cabin, on the balcony, for two hours, with Ginosar, Abu Mazen, this that and the other, idle chatter, gossip, jokes, nothing substantial because there was nothing to get real about as long as the teams didn't have a mandate from Arafat to progress."

Occasionally, Ben-Ami would sit with Barak and show him encouraging signs of progress in the teams' work. Barak would shrug. "If you, like Peres, expect them to give 20%, or like Haim Ramon expect them to give 10% and then another ten, I know that they won't agree, and in hindsight, that's what happened. Even if, like Yossi Ginosar, you expect them to agree to 92% or 94%. What later became clear was an incorrect assessment."

After the meeting on the balcony of Arafat's cabin, Barak is even more convinced his position is justified: "We have here the matter of dispersing a fog that was however said very politely. So, on the whole, there wasn't any point in sitting together, but so no one says that that was the reason the summit failed, I sat with Arafat and we parted in good spirits."

The meeting with Arafat, Barak assesses, is different than any previous meeting of an Israeli leader with a Palestinian personality "because the most crucial things were on the table and it is a moment of truth. It's not like Moshe Dayan's meeting with Fadwa Touqan, when he reached the conclusion that the Palestinians are more difficult than they were thirty years ago. It is also unlike David Ben-Gurion's meeting with Musa Alami almost 70 years ago. Ben-Gurion too reached the conclusion that the Palestinians are a much more difficult partner than they seem. What I did was a practical test, as a political need to reach an agreement and it turns out that the painful truth is that Arafat isn't a partner and any other statement is an illusion or self-deception. And why do I say this? I found that Arafat does indeed accept the fact of the state of Israel's existence, but he does not accept its moral right to exist and he doesn't accept the existence of the Israeli people as the Jewish people. He accepts the existence of the Jewish religion - but since according to him there is no such thing as a Jewish nation, and religion doesn't have a state, he therefore doesn't accept Israel's right to exist as the state of the Jewish people."

At the camp he sums things up for himself: "We have been here for eight-nine days and nothing. I've checked via the Americans, and nothing. I also checked via Yossi Ginosar, who for us is the appropriate person to judge anything related to Arafat's state of mind. I said to him, 'sit with him for as many hours as you need and come back with your best assessment. For none know him like you do.' And I asked him, 'okay, so what does he want?' and Yossi answered honestly: 'I couldn't tell you.' And that says it all."

Looking back Barak knows that "at Camp David there was an attempt to get from us and from Clinton a detailed as possible document with the record of the positions we agreed to. Arafat says to himself, if they give everything I want, I'll agree. If not - I'll keep what they offered on record and move forward from there.

That was the method and I cannot agree to that. But because these negotiations are important for everyone, and no less for myself, to show the sincerity of my intentions, I agree to even talk about eighty percent being transferred immediately and twenty percent being postponed. But I must see the other side's response, and there wasn't any."

Barak goes one step further to test the seriousness of the intentions and Arafat's ability to decide: "Again we said that we are willing to divide the disputed territory according to the same proportions - let's say, one to seven or eight - so that they have in advance the assurance that it won't be seventy-thirty and that at the end of the road, they'll receive their share also from those twenty.

"This time they didn't say no, but they kept saying our position is on the high end of one hundred. So I say to myself as follows, let's say that Yossi Ginosar knows best what the Palestinians want, and ninety two percent is the range in which we can reach an agreement - and it's pretty clear to everyone why they can't say that now - because if they say it now, they will go further and then they'll seem like they're milking us for more. And that's why it's pretty clear that this isn't the real answer at all, but at the same time it's obvious that there's no way to check this without actually putting it to the test."

Barak retreats into himself again: "My thinking was that at some point we may be willing to discuss the President's ideas, which really mean discussing joint governance in the Old City of Jerusalem, but that sovereignty will be divided - part theirs and part ours - not gladly, but we were willing to discuss. Here too… I said this to Clinton: let's sit our teams with their teams head-to-head. Two of theirs and two of ours. Let Arafat tell his people what he will and I'll say what I say, let them take a night and see what they can do. As it is Arafat says that all this depends solely on Barak giving them the authority, as if they're not authorized to discuss, and you don't want it documented that you gave them authority. I said, okay, I'll give my sponsorship, you give yours as you see fit and let's see if they can even come up with something. I thought," said Barak, "that perhaps the right way was a thought experiment, seeing as it was clear that people do not want to speak on behalf of Arafat so as not to commit him."

Before Ben-Ami and Sher sat with Erekat and Abu Ala, the Israeli team held another conversation about Jerusalem: "Among ourselves we even spoke about what presence they would have in the neighborhoods. Maybe like the Arab neighborhood administration in Beit Safafa. We said that we need control of security, public order and infrastructure - so that they don't change the skyline or build wildly. We don't care about balconies, but they can't change the skyline. You don't build on empty lots without coordination. Members and representatives in Jerusalem municipality etc., all under the auspices of our Jerusalem Municipality. We worked on the other components of Jerusalem, but we said as follows: imagine that everything has been solved, borders and everything else, and now we start living together. Two states. What quarrel does the Palestinian state have? Jerusalem. And what can it do? An ongoing Intifada inside Jerusalem. And anything they do in Jerusalem will be aimed

not at the benefit of the residents, improving infrastructure, etc., it will all be devoted to the political aspect. And it is therefore likely that there will be violence and we will not be able to guarantee the safety of the few Israeli residents of disputed neighborhoods that we don't know what will be with them.

On July 15, Saturday (Shabbat - no one is thinking about a government crisis, apparently Rubenstein also thinks it's a matter of *pikuach nefesh*), a simultaneous game is going on, with the participation of Ben-Ami opposite Erekat; Gilead Sher opposite Omar Dajani, a Palestinian-British lawyer the Palestinians brought in as a legal writer; and Israel Hason opposite Muhammad Dahlan. They sat one with the other for almost twenty hours and tried to build a model.

"The technique is this," says Barak, "we give our people the responsibility of trying to reach some kind of an outcome, let them sit a night and see what they can come up with. And then Shlomo Ben-Ami and Gili sit with Saeb Erekat for a whole night. 12 or 24 hours and then they present it to us, and this is something quite far-reaching. Even a little bit more far-reaching than what I thought, because in the spirit of things Shlomo went slightly further. But at the moment it doesn't matter, because if there is an agreement, it isn't important; and if there isn't - then in any case nothing happened."

"In the conversations Shlomo led them to understand that under certain conditions we would not only give them municipal partnership in the areas they are accustomed to. On the topic of Jerusalem we even spoke about coordination between the two municipalities - Jerusalem and Abu-Dis - while the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem have additional authority, and in practice have neighborhood administrations like in the western city and a central administration under Israeli sovereignty - except for 'overall security' and supervision of building - but most of the authority is in local Palestinian hands, when we know that the real political affinity is to the Palestinian Authority. Even if Shlomo led them to understand more than I intended, I didn't make a big deal of it. I said, if there's real intention on the other side, then that small difference doesn't matter. And in fact when the issue was presented Saeb Erekat said there's something to it, went to Arafat, Arafat said it wasn't enough, and that was the end of it."

But Clinton wasn't one to give up his Nobel. Barak disagrees with these descriptions that appear in the media. For these are historic processes that touch upon people's lives, and Clinton is a serious person and a great statesman.

On July 16 in the afternoon, Clinton threatens that if he doesn't get Arafat's response to Barak's proposals, he will portray him as responsible for the failure of the talks. Arafat considers, perhaps he got a fright, and came to Clinton's cabin at night and told him he is willing to concede a territory of between 8 and 10 percent. Yes! At least it was a beginning. That night Rob Malley came to Ben-Ami and Gilead Sher's cabin. Malley is the only American the Palestinians recognize as someone who is not Jewish or under Barak's command, including Clinton. Malley says that Arafat will demand serious territorial exchanges if he's leaving 8 to 10 percent of the West Bank

to the Israelis. The condition: a deal over Jerusalem, and it is clear that Haram al-Sharif is theirs.

Clinton suggests to Barak: "Arafat is taking the Muslim and Christian Quarters, you take the Armenian and the Jewish, you be sovereign of the Western Wall and your portions of the City of David and Kidron and they'll be sovereign of their parts." As for the Temple Mount, he suggested several formulations: "They are sovereign above ground and you underneath the surface," and even spoke of "joint custodianship. Even international and you will be responsible for this custodianship".

Later on it became clear that Arafat accepts and insists on the issue of the דיוואן in the Palestinian quarters plus a flag. "My feeling," says Barak, "and that of his close aides, was that if we give them a דיוואן, with a flag, we will be able to somehow progress, but this was exactly what the dispute was about. Here is the Temple Mount, here Al-Aqsa and here the wall. And at this point I am willing for him to have a route, like a narrow sleeve, five meters of each side of the road from the דיוואן to Haram al-Sharif in his sovereignty. After all, he has sovereignty inside the Old City and when he wants to get to Haram al-Sharif, he crosses the road on foot and goes in." At this point Arafat wants a flag also on the Temple Mount and Barak says to Clinton clearly: "I will not sign a document that transfers the Temple Mount to the Palestinian Authority. If they want peace, we can find a hundred routes to a solution, without pushing into the corner I disagree on."

The Sixth Stage: Where Has Ehud Barak Disappeared?

At this stage Barak has already understood that this is it, the examination has actually ended and we need to go for summation, or get out of there if there's nothing concrete and that's what he tells Clinton: "Actually, internally I have already come to terms with the fact that the tidings will not come from Camp David. In any case, not from this round. As the time drew on it became clear to me time after time that Arafat refuses to muster the courage to seal a deal, or perhaps plotted in advance to put a spoke in the wheels of the process - let the historians decide. At this stage I have learned that he is not yet ready and for me this ends the current chapter. I am aware that Clinton is about to leave for the G8 Summit in Okinawa and speak with him, and he says to me: 'I'm leaving Albright here.' But with all due respect to Madeleine Albright, I didn't think she was capable of convincing Arafat to progress on the disputed topics."

On the afternoon of July 19, Barak uses the internal phone to call Clinton's cabin to tell him the Israeli delegation is leaving. There was a slight pause. "It could be that he thought this was a trick," Barak says, "then he said to me, in a restrained voice: 'I don't think that's the right thing to do.'"

Barak explains once again in great detail, as is his way, why there is no point in staying, and certainly without him. And he says to him: "Let me digest this." Barak says "Okay," but packs his bags and calls Danny Yatom to prepare the delegation for return. Yatom walks in, sees the suitcase lying on the bed and immediately

understands, but looked at Barak doubtfully. “That’s it Danny,” Barak says to him, “we’re going. We have nothing to do here.”

Another doubtful look, another short explanation and Yatom uses an external phone line to call the pilots and instructs them to prepare the airplane. Then he looks at Barak with his usual serious expression, and asks again, “Are we going?” with the phone still in his hand. “Home!” Barak says decisively. Yatom instructs to notify the airplane’s crew to purchase supplies for the plane amounting to tens of thousands of shekels (if they don’t leave some of the money goes down the drain) and leaves the cabin to report to Sandy Berger and notify the Israelis. Within minutes the rumor spread throughout the delegations’ cabins. Yatom returns and tells how Sandy Berger literally fell off his feet. Perhaps because the one announcing the conclusion of the summit is the Israeli Prime Minister and not the President of the United States. In any event, Berger says to Yatom: “I am going to speak with the Secretary of State and with the President.” Yatom returns to Barak and on the way meets Nabil Abu Rudeineh who says to him, “We’ve heard, we don’t believe it.” Members of the Palestinian delegation stood huddled at the entrance to their cabins and watched the Israeli suitcases make their way to the entrance of Barak’s cabin, and never said a word. Yatom assumed that the Americans don’t quite believe it, because everyone recalls the luggage artifices of all the region’s leaders, from Begin and Sadat to Arafat and Bibi, but in the meantime the military truck reaches the cabin’s entrance. The suitcases - the permanent symbol of crisis in the Middle East talks - were loaded and taken to the airplane. “By nature,” Barak says, “I do not look back, and I was already focused on the day after, waiting in my room to be called when preparations to leave were completed, and not before I properly bid the President of the United States farewell, of course.”

At this point Saeb Erekat, Asfur and Muhammad Dahlan rushed to Elyakim Rubenstein and Gilead Sher and to Dan Meridor and tried to appeal to them. Yatom returns to Barak and tells him that they think there is reason to stay. “They should say what the reason is,” Barak says to him and goes back to reading his book.

At this point security reports to Yatom that the luggage is onboard. “Okay” says Barak and then the phone rings. It was Bill Clinton. “I’m on my way to you,” he says to Barak.

“All right,” Barak says.

Sometime later Clinton knocks on the door. As usual, he’s wearing jeans, a sweatshirt and sneakers. His expression is worried and perhaps even really sad. “He’s a pretty tall fellow and even solidly-built,” Barak says, “but despite his impressive physical presence, he suffers from backaches and aches in his joints which, in private conversations, cause him to writhe in a hesitant gymnastic dialogue with himself.” But now, in Barak’s room, Clinton stands straight as a sentry. “Hi Eyhud,” he says in a very calm voice.

“Hi Bill,” Barak says (in the presence of strangers Barak is careful not to speak with Clinton too familiarly. It’s always Mr. President, etc.).

There was a moment of silence, of the kind in which two adults with sincere intentions to deal seriously and responsibly with the fate of people know everything

without having to say a word. “It’s a shame,” Clinton says, “It’ll be a great loss. After all, I am completely invested in this.”

“It really is a shame,” Barak says, “but you can see where this is going. We will stay for a weekend of nothing, you’re leaving for Okinawa and when you return it will be worse.”

Clinton nods his head as in confirmation, but continues convincing: “We are at the most critical moment, another small effort and it might work.”

“But you are leaving,” Barak retorts, “and I doubt if Albright is capable of doing what you didn’t do.”

Clinton does not give up. “I won't stay there more than the required minimum and after all, I must get together with the G8 twenty billion dollars that are supposed to solve the refugee problem, infrastructure such as desalination and Israel’s security problems. I’ll convince them to establish this fund. It’s difficult, but it’s a shame to give up at this critical moment.”

Barak doesn’t think this moment is any different than other moments. “We’ve been treading water about for ten days now. There isn’t even a hint that the other side might display leadership, so what can happen while you’re away that hasn’t happened until now? As far as I’m concerned,” Barak says, “it’s appropriate to conclude here.”

Clinton thinks to himself. Shakes his head in slight refusal. “OK,” he says as if to himself, “I’m postponing the trip to Okinawa until tomorrow and I presume I’ll have Arafat’s response tomorrow.”

Barak doesn’t quite buy this, but considers. This isn’t only about Bill and Ehud, but rather about the President of the United States who is postponing a presidential trip in order to try and bridge this gap. “OK,” he says to Clinton, “we’ll give this fetus another chance, but” he warns, “I am not engaging in any discussion while you’re not here,” he says to Clinton. “Clinton asked me to wait,” he clarifies, “so I agreed.”

The next day Clinton left for Okinawa and “left behind a trail of expectation that we continue to discuss with Albright.”

As a matter of fact, Clinton tricked Barak in a way Barak did not expect of the President of the United States. “What happened” according to summit participants, “was that Clinton tricked both Barak and Arafat. Ehud understood that Arafat was supposed to give an answer the next morning, and so he stayed. Clinton left and the problem was that Arafat didn’t understand that he was supposed to respond by the next day, and in the meantime everyone stayed with Clinton leaving Albright to calm everyone in a joint meal.” Shlomo Ben-Ami believes Barak was furious at Arafat, and sat at the entire meal in silence: “He didn’t speak for hours and conveyed terrible rage, which according to the Palestinians was actually perceived as him deeply humiliating Arafat.”

But more than his anger with Arafat, Barak was furious with Clinton. “He was untypically furious” says Yossi Ginosar, who knows Barak as a usually cold-blooded Jew. “Ehud came to dinner and didn’t speak with Arafat even when Arafat came up to him. And then Arafat got offended and after we all went our separate ways then Ehud disappeared for two days.”

Barak shrugs: “I wasn’t offended and I didn’t disappear… while Clinton was in Okinawa,” explaining his disappearance which isn’t clear to the delegation members to this day. “There were some meetings, but I simply secluded myself. I didn’t want to be a party in these social meetings during meals. In any case the teams sat and never got anywhere. There was even a certain regression, each more entrenched in their position…an impossible situation was created after the President left: he left me with one thing - that discussions will not continue; Arafat with another - that we can continue discussing; and Albright and her team on-hold, waiting to see if we’ll be tempted to continue the discussion, and then we’ll have to pay. This seemed to me practically not right and inappropriate. Indeed, I was angry with Clinton, but here’s the catch: Albright and her team are dedicated and serious and they will be offended if I refuse sitting with them. They might even rightly interpret it as arrogance. And everything is taking place in a small compound in which everything takes place together - from meals to the canteen, the game rooms and gym. Even the living room in my cabin which is where the Israeli team meets. Therefore, I had no choice to display my dissatisfaction with Clinton’s mode of operation other than to announce by means of my conduct that until there is an answer, until Arafat decides or until Clinton overcomes his restraint against firmly demanding an answer from Arafat, I am out of the game. It’s obvious that Arafat won’t give Albright the answer he’s supposed to give to Clinton, and I simply waited until Clinton returned. I announced that my cabin won't be the meeting place for Israeli group in the coming two days. I read John Lukacs’ *Five Days in London* cover to cover, a fascinating book about the decisive five days at the onset of World War II. Einat Gluska would bring salads and all the rest is fairy tales…but I mainly spent the time thinking. This is no easy responsibility. I knew all along that if I reach an agreement, even if very painful, I could pass it and I had confidence in myself that I would not make an agreement that was bad for the state of Israel, even though my concept of what is good or bad for the state of Israel is different from that of most of the right-wing and some of the left-wing. But here we had indication that this was a situation in which there might not be an agreement and we will have to go far. On the other hand, it is possible that we won't know if we could have reached an agreement without putting ourselves in risk of not having an agreement, and the discussed content leaking out. And this is something that exacts a very high political price, internally and even internationally.”

While by himself, he goes over everything in his head. Including musings about the path that brought Arafat here. “The great activeness surrounding him that brought him the Nobel probably went to his head. But as far as I’m concerned he can’t be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize when he signs something that opens his way into the world, that elevates him to the status of a dignified leaders and all this without him having to concede anything. All he has given until now is a vague promise to change, which in his culture doesn’t mean peace, but an interim situation that might change.”

Barak goes back to his usual story, of the Prophet Muhammad’s battle in the region of Medina, in Saudi Arabia, in which he had to secure the southern wing on pilgrimage to Mecca against a neighboring tribe of infidels. “He agreed on an

armistice with them" Barak says, "but authorized himself in advance to breach the agreement as soon as he was strong enough. It took him seven or eight years and he breached the agreement, then the Islamic man who fights in the name of the Prophet is allowed to lie and promise anything."

Barak doesn't want to be in that place, therefore "when he gets territory from me I want to know exactly what he's giving me." Barak is also concerned that he cannot see signs of a peace movement on the other side. "And why can't 200 thousand Palestinians calling for peace gather in Gaza?"

He is not so naïve that he would ask this simplistically, but from his point of view "there is mainly a difference between the societies. We are a normal society - trips and holidays in Turkey are more interesting to people than the subtleties of where the border line passes. In comparison to us the Palestinian society is a society in battle - it is willing to enlist, it is not exactly asked, and it isn't exactly democratic and it's easily maneuvered to the edge. On the other hand, there are people there who understand that the Israelis won't concede everything, which is why the fine line runs where all the tallying reaches the point of equilibrium, and the questions of whether there is an opportunity here and how right is it to go far in order to examine this, and how much will we know if we've exhausted the matter or not. We'll know for ourselves, not for convincing others. These are the things I think about while others think I was angry or offended."

During the day he went missing from his friends he would from time to time come out of his cabin and walk around Camp David - three quarters of an hour per round. Twice in an hour and a half - observing the Israeli and American teams competing on the basketball court and simply thinking. "Time and time again I go through where we stand on each of the topics we're dealing with, what we can do, can we reach more some other way, can I pass it in the state of Israel and how, what is the real meaning of each step, and where will the border lie. When an agreement succeeds then it's no problem to know where the border should be, because where it succeeded is where the border should probably be. And what happens when it, Heaven forbid, doesn't succeed? Not succeeding at Camp David is also not a simple matter. You have to ask yourself: 'Okay, I've gone this far, and it could be that another little step forward means an agreement. That is no small thing. It means thousands of graves less. It is a shift in direction of the history of the Middle East'. It doesn't change the Arabs' basic perception, I am devoid of illusions on that matter, it goes back generations. Even if there was an agreement, it would take generations to reconcile with everyone." All this goes round and round in his head, and occasionally the real question flickers: "I need to assess what more could help us clarify the other side's intentions, without the actual investigation causing us any harm. Because if the reality is that the other side is really prepared to make some hard decisions then we can't miss it, even if the price for us is very very painful…I am aware of the great historic responsibility concealed in the possibility of missing an opportunity. On the other hand, we carry the weight of the supreme responsibility to prevent lapsing into a state of surrender by closing our eyes on reality as it is, and that is why I constantly hone the question of the fine line."

He is aware of the internal political situation in Israel and the fragility of his coalition and knows to tell himself that "this is a heavy responsibility, because you are not supposed to ask only where the equilibrium point of consent in Israel stands at the moment. I don't think that Ben-Gurion checked the levels of consent when deciding on the establishment of the state. He didn't even have a majority in the government. Or Begin, when reaching an agreement at Camp David, he thought it was right, even if he thought that in addition he was saving Judea and Samaria. When De Gaulle said to the pied-noirs 'I understand you', he knew exactly why he wasn't saying I agree with you. Because he knew he was going toward something very difficult. But even he didn't assess exactly where and how it would end. Kissinger too wasn't quite sure exactly how things would end in Vietnam, and he certainly didn't know what would happen several years later. But this is a type of historic conflict that comes to a crossroads and you have to rise above things and ask yourself what is the right thing to do. Where is the line that marks what we can afford [to give] and in return get an agreement, and on the other hand, how can we create a situation in which such a process doesn't lead to a situation in which there is no agreement and you've also sold all your assets."

When Barak has this awful conversation with himself he returns to the dispute over the border with Jordan as an allegory for the entire process. The Israeli proposal formulated in the security committee at Camp David defines that: Israel will have three early-warning stations on the mountain ridge and control of the airspace. The Jordan Valley will be declared a security zone. Israel will move out gradually according to the situation (in Jordan more than in Israel and the Palestinian territories), until it is transferred in entirety or partially to the Palestinian Authority. A third of the water line will be in Israeli hands, two-thirds in Palestinian hands. An American-Israeli-Palestinian force will supervise the Jordan crossings. "They insisted on the border with Jordan," Barak says, "no matter how short their border with Jordan will be." This direct connection actually gives them rights over the water all the way to upstream Jordan River. And Arafat has direct contact with Jordan which touches upon our anxieties. Our unequivocal demand stated that that would not be and I said very clearly: only he who ends the conflict will have direct contact with Jordan, and it will be defined according to our method including monitoring arrangements, and until then - nothing."

As always, he maintains two basics: "If I come with an agreement I agree with, then I'll successfully win over the majority. If we don't come with an agreement it will be very bad, but it will be very bad as it is." And from here on in he waits for Clinton. In the meantime he studies the relevant historic agreements: the Peel Commission report, which is the first British partition plan from the 1930s and the first plan for the establishment of the Jewish state in the forties. The Faisal-Weizmann agreement, between Haim Weizmann and the Saudi Prince in 1919 regarding the division of the Land of Israel, and other relevant historical agreements. In the meantime, on July 23 Clinton returns from Japan. "I know that something will move only if he throws his weight," says Barak. "There was also no point is us sitting together, the three of us,

again. In everyone's presence I can't come down on Arafat, Arafat can't come down on me, he can't come down on us both. We all understand the rules and are trying to roll the responsibility on each other and at the same time prepare for the possibility that something might happen later on and not break the rules of the game. That's why he has to work with the teams. And that way he sits twice with each side. Once security, once borders, once Jerusalem and once refugees, while the most sensitive issue on the agenda is the right of return."

On the morning of the 24th Clinton meets with the refugee teams on both sides, where he characterized everything discussed thus far. Meaning - what he would want the two sides to view as the basis for discussion and agreement, "and he defines things even above and beyond what we are prepared for and much more than what they are prepared for," says Barak, "and he stood and demanded this while stating firmly: 'I want this to be the basis for discussion.'"

When it comes to discussing the refugees, we are talking about the most useful tool Arafat utilizes in leading his battle for a Palestinian state: "Arafat uses the world's identification with the refugee problem as well as the sensitivity of parts of the Israeli public in a most sophisticated way. His goal is to recruit international support and transform the right of return into diplomatic leverage for isolating Israel and the point of departure for a violent struggle aimed at undermining its standing and legitimacy, thus enhancing the ability to concede and reach an agreement in the spirit of Arafat, that is withdrawal to '67 borders, including Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and implementation of the right of return.

"My view was that we also have to finalize the issue of the right of return. We can't leave it open because the Palestinian claim embodies an objection to the core of Israel's existence. Time after time, orally and in writing, I made it clear to Clinton that Israel would not accept even one refugee. We will agree to a return to Palestinian territories and we will help international funds with the refugee problem, and we assume that we will be willing to accept a very limited number of refugees on humanitarian grounds and to slightly expand family reunifications that in any case come to Israel in all Israeli governments to date. That is why I said to Clinton in the clearest manner possible: 'Israel is not prepared to accept juridical or moral responsibility for the issue of the refugees.'"

Personally, Barak's childhood was tainted by the existential threat on Israel. When one day the infants of his childhood group were awoken "and we heard muffled sounds of mortars from the village of Qaqun, from east. War. It turned out that the Iraqi army came from Baghdad and almost cut across the Jewish settlement." Bound by that memory he tells Arafat: "Mr. Chairman, the moment the state of Israel was established, under the terrible concession of the partition plan, five Arab states attacked in order to destroy it. Had they succeeded, there would not be a refugee problem. But there also wouldn't have been a state of Israel. We cannot become legally and morally responsible for surviving and winning. And this is how it turned out. At the same time that this refugee problem was created, a similar problem of 650 thousand Jewish refugees from Arab countries was created, from Morocco to Iraq and we didn't call them refugees, but brothers and today they and their children comprise

the majority of Israel. The Arabs never did anything similar, even when they held 100% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip for 19 years."

* * *

Already during Barak's first visit to Britain as Prime Minister he asks Tony Blair what he thinks the most complex issue in the negotiations with the Palestinians will be and Blair immediately responds: "The refugees." Barak asks: "why?" and Blair says: "I'm not familiar with the details but I do know that all the practical things can be worked out, but when it comes to symbols each side is looking for its ultimate justice." On the other hand, the Americans tell Barak that the English language is rich enough for a situation in which both parties are willing and then we can come up with a formulation that for the one side acknowledges the injustice and the other side will not have to commit to anything. Barak says to them: "OK, this I am willing to do. There was a question about how we formulate this mechanism. Elyakim sat with their lawyer and an American lawyer and they wrote quite a lot of material that aimed to solve and to move forward, but it doesn't mean that Arafat agreed. He wants to arrive at a situation in which he establishes the Palestinian state that dictates to Israel the solution for the refugee problem while he's Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, but he's still the head of the PLO whose central motif is reinstating the refugees' rights and he wants to be in a situation in which he can say to his public 'I didn't betray and didn't misuse' and he doesn't have the courage to decide. And up to now we haven't found the formulation. And I don't find him ready for this…we do not presume to erase the dream of return. You're allowed to dream. On our end too, there were many Israelis who dreamed even after we accepted the historic fact that we won't be on the eastern bank of the Jordan. As soon as the historical circumstances enabled us, in the framework of defense and extrication from the choke ring in the Six Day War, to take over control anew, the dream awoke and came to life. But that dream was never a practical policy of the Israeli government and no government to date, I hope, would seek out the pretense to start a war that would enable us to reconquer the West Bank, and the moment it stops being practical politics, a political goal and stays a dream, a wish, a historic memory, Arafat can't make use of a political desire. On the other hand, we have to recognize that this is what he is doing and because of it demand the finality of the conflict."

As far as Barak is concerned, insisting on the conclusion of the conflict is a matter of essence that carries the weight of the entire agreement: "When we say end of the conflict we mean that in this agreement we reach it will be written that it is acknowledged by the parties as the implementation of UN resolutions 242, 338 and 194, and then it will be possible to pass a UN resolution that states that the conflict has ended and there is an agreement between Israel and Palestine and with that the international legitimacy for demanding the right of return is finally pulled out from under them. For their strength is not the strength of the Palestinians themselves. As it is, there are dozens of similar conflicts in all corners of the world. There are hundreds of dispute areas in the world. What happened originally was that at the actual time of

the event that the collective of the world's nations documented what they thought required dealing with and defined the parameters for doing so. And they renewed the demand for dealing with '67. This is the Palestinian's strength. They always came to an international forum and said do what you believe in and have committed to."

Amnon Shahak and Oded Eran do not believe that the negotiations ran into difficulties because of the right of return. They believe that the right of return was the ace Arafat kept up his sleeve, hoping to receive in return for sovereignty of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Eran himself constantly heard from the Palestinians that "the implementation of the right of return doesn't have to be in full numbers", and during Camp David Abu Mazen suggested "to take the heads of the refugee families for a tour of Israel and show them that their homes no longer exist", as part of their recuperation process. Barak himself is aware that there are Israelis who say that in 1991, when Arafat was on the ropes after the Gulf War he used to say in private talks that he is prepared for a settlement on the right of return. At the time he said, "The return of the refugees to Israel, or financial reparation."

Barak believes that Eran and Shahak's perception derives from "bait that under the right circumstances the Palestinians throw to well-intending Israelis to create a semblance of seriousness. Arafat is slippery, and today he stands the test of truth and I am not about to let him get away."

On the other hand, Barak looks directly at the bleeding heart of the Palestinian refugee problem: "since Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion we know that you do not buy the national aspirations of a nation with money." On yet another hand, he interjects as if incidentally, "there were millions of euros ready and waiting for transfer to the Authority, on two conditions: transparency and monitoring, and they're not capable of meeting these conditions," and "Michel Rocard did the work for transferring the money for Chris Patten at the European Commission. He examined the Palestinian Authority's institutions and their work processes, so that the world will be able to transfer the funds and provide the tax payers with a satisfactory explanation about where the money is going, and it turned out that everything is infected with corruption. They didn't succeed and do not want to establish this thing. I said to Rocard, 'This is the difference between a kleptocracy and a democracy. They steal the money there and that's why it's difficult for them to receive money with which they could cool the religious passion, but they don't want to and this is a matter of cause and effect."

Basically, he doesn't accept Shahak and Eran's position.

The Seventh Stage: Clinton's Thoughts

Barak is also aware of the Hamas' formulation that says to postpone the refugee problem to the framework of relations with Israel based on Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's "Muslim Truce", but what is currently on the table at Camp David is not necessarily the refugee problem, but rather the dead end in the talks about Jerusalem. In Barak's

opinion, Clinton is "wasting the entire day on the teams' talks" on this issue. To his mind he had to pressure Arafat on Jerusalem: "We said then that perhaps we should recruit Clinton to talk to them and convince them to tell Arafat and his group to at least agree to the Jerusalem Outline. Even though it was clear that it would be very hard for them to do so. In order to disperse the responsibility should this not work, the Palestinians constantly say 'we don't know if it'll work, we don't know if the time is right, we want several summits and all that'. The reason isn't an objective one, but their tactical need not to be exposed in their positions if they have the temptation of more waiting for them." Nevertheless, to push Arafat up against the wall Barak speaks with Clinton about the Jerusalem Outline, and Clinton repeats his proposals for dividing the city to neighborhoods, etc. "Listen," he says to Clinton, trying to see if the waters had abated, "if these proposals regarding Jerusalem are presented as yours and Arafat accepts them as the basis for discussions - we'll enter the discussion."

Clinton goes to Arafat, who is elusive. He wants a clear Israeli statement. During the course of the day Madeleine Albright asks to sit with Barak and he refuses: "I'm not willing to give her what I in fact gave Clinton as the Israeli position. What she wanted was for me to say that this is the Israeli position and I, of course, told her that she can't present it as such." And Arafat is still elusive. "This didn't work either and there really wasn't any point in staying, but Clinton pressured us. And I didn't want to spoil. It would have been quite easy to reach a situation in which the Americans throw the responsibility on us, so we went for another round, banged on the table again, more convincing, until we reached the edge. It was now clear to everyone that if we go on like this, then this pattern will continue endlessly. A decision had to be made and I made it, with a painful historical analysis that this is not working, and I announced that this is it. This time, we leave. That's final."

The problem now is to leave smartly. And even after he decided that all is lost, no matter how conclusive he sounds, he still constantly maintains a modicum of doubt and a small chink of a possibility that it might all be different: "I all the time operate based on an assumption that I don't know what is right. I hope that the positive side is right. Hope and believe. And do everything to ensure and to check. I thought that if Arafat is a real historic leader of the Palestinian people, he'll agree to this."

In an absolutely final attempt, Clinton now raises far-reaching ideas and conveys them to Barak as "ideas", and both sides are expected to respond to Clinton whether they accept his ideas. "I suppose" Barak says, "that he did this with an understanding that we won't reject them. Clinton had a feeling that something could still change…at some point Clinton says to me 'I'm going to make one last attempt,' and then I worry that our enthusiasm during Camp David might strengthen the extremists on the Palestinian side. If we said on that night, in the discussions between Shlomo and Gili and two of them, that we are prepared to accept the summaries even though they go beyond the boundaries I set, then in the internal Palestinian debate Abu Ala and Abu Mazen were right and not Rashid and Dahlan. The younger two said let's go to an agreement assuming we have the authority to decide, and the older two drew back and alerted Arafat. Inside Camp David the need to reach a situation in which what he hears now is the 'rock bottom', ours and the Americans' final position

and no more, is becoming more intense. You want, it's your prerogative but there isn't an agreement. And Clinton sits with him and on him and at last comes back to us. 'Here's the outline' he says: 'regarding security arrangements, more or less what we agreed between us.' I say, plausible, acceptable. They want to have a point of contact here and reach the water line there, and I say, it might work. As far as they're concerned there is an importance in reaching the water line downstream and according to international law - this is all in the realm of plausible. Regarding territory, Clinton tells me that he told Arafat in the most direct manner: 'you say how much.' It was possible to understand that if I, Clinton, also say eight or nine percent and two for exchange, it'll pass, but it's all up in the air because Clinton doesn't have Arafat's consent."

Later on Clinton suggests several ideas to Arafat regarding Jerusalem and regarding the refugees. "He proposes several ideas that we will concede a little bit in Jerusalem and they will concede the right of return. And then we need a more far-reaching formulation. Clinton proposes Palestinian sovereignty of the outer envelope of the Temple Mount, and Israeli sovereignty of the Temple Mount but with Palestinian custodianship. For Jerusalem he talks about functional autonomy in the inner neighborhoods and Palestinian sovereignty of two of the Old City quarters, or Palestinian sovereignty of the inner neighborhoods and functional autonomy in the Old City, or, postponing the discussion of Jerusalem for three years." Barak responds: "Even if they spoke about the possibility of us having two of the Old City's quarters and them having two quarters, they have practical hold of their part and we have overall hold (they have sovereignty and we have overall sovereignty)." Barak is cautious about accepting this as Israel's agreed-upon position, he agonizes, but agrees that Clinton speak in his own name about American ideas brought to both parties for consideration and thus put Arafat to the test. Clinton says to him: "I'm coming over." Barak says: "Welcome," and Clinton retorts with "I'm on my way." When they sit Barak says, "I've known Arafat for many years, I follow him much more than you, he will not take action unless he feels that there's no choice. That this is a historic moment, not only that there's a carrot waiting for him at the end, if he succeeds. It is clear what the carrot is, a state and the world's recognition of the necessity of solving the refugee problem. That is mostly what he wants. Indeed, not one hundred percent, but if he doesn't feel that he has at once reached the rock bottom of our positions and rock bottom of your (the American) positions and that there are no chinks, and then you don't put it squarely on the table that there is a price for his refusal to move forwards - then you needn't go to him. Not because he is stubborn, but because he has real pressures, on the substantial issues. He thinks he's doing something difficult, and he must decide because it's now or never. He has to understand that it boils down to that - now or not in his lifetime."

Clinton nods. He leaves for his cabin, where he is joined by Sandy Berger, George Tenet, Abu Ala and Saeb Erekat who arrive with Arafat. Clinton repeats his proposal and says clearly: "this is *my* proposal, neither party has to accept or respond immediately." In a portion of the meeting, Clinton, Berger and Arafat sit alone. As Clinton is supposed to bang on the table and move him in the right direction. Barak

later hears that “he did as best as he can, but it isn’t clear that for a person such as Arafat, who has seen so much, it resonates that the President is really backed by the entire United States.”

Arafat says to him in that same conversation: “I will not betray my people, you want to come to my funeral, I prefer dying over agreeing to Israeli sovereignty of the Haram. I do not want to go down in history as a traitor. And Clinton says to him: “Barak is presenting real deals in the form of concessions and you’re showing nothing. You missed out in 1947 and in 1978 and now again, you will not have a state. You should know that our relationship is through, Congress will vote to cease the support and declare you a terrorist organization, you want to hold on to what Barak supposedly gave you, and it won't work.” And Tenet says to him: “You are putting an end to our relationship.”

Barak understands that “they tried the full force of their weight”, and according to American reports, the Palestinians left quite in shock. Berger came to Barak immediately after the meeting and tells him that Clinton banged on the table and that he was great. That he’s never seen Clinton so furious.

Arafat didn’t say yes and he didn’t say no, and there was an air of decision. Barak convenes the Israeli team for consultation, “and we come to a conclusion that first of all we don’t have a lot of time, but we have to reach a decision tonight. I had an understanding with Clinton that there would not be surprises à la unacceptable American impositions. I suppose that the Palestinians had such an understanding too. The Americans reiterated, we want the President to have both parties’ answers by nine pm. Apparently the atmosphere created in the angry meeting with Arafat was such that made it clear that it wasn’t a good idea that Arafat come to give the President the answer. And the assembly dispersed with an understanding that there was another summary meeting in the evening.”

Barak decided there was no point in going to that meeting and sends Ben-Ami. Ben-Ami comes to him before he goes to meet with Erekat and Barak instructs him not to divulge Israel’s response before he hears Arafat’s response. It isn’t clear what is going on in Arafat’s head at this very moment, but Barak seems to at once internalize the weight of the moment: “A historic moment,” he says repeatedly to Ben-Ami, “this is a historic moment.” At the meeting itself Clinton asks Ben-Ami for the Israeli delegation’s response, and Ben-Ami says, “This time I would like to wait until the other side responds.” Clinton looks at Erekat, who by any theatrical standard looks miserable. “I don’t want to know what you think about my paper,” he says to Erekat, “I want to know what your proposal is.” Erekat says: “I don’t have a concrete proposal at this time,” and Clinton sends him back to Arafat to understand if Arafat has a counter-proposal. Erekat returns and says: “We don’t have a counter-proposal,” handing Clinton a paper envelope and in it a negative response.

“There was a certain tension,” Barak says, “even though we knew his answer was negative. But they tried to prepare a joint announcement that summarizes the summit and there is progress to move forward. At my instruction Shlomo Ben-Ami

says that there is no agreement, there was nothing and everything discussed is as if it never was.

"Ben-Ami adds to this and says to them, 'The government will fall, the peace camp will collapse.'

"Erekat wrung his hands helplessly."

Ben-Ami returns to Barak's cabin. Recounts the meeting's events in staccato. Barak doesn't say a word. As far as he's concerned the meaning is clear: Arafat's refusal to discuss Clinton's ideas will lead to the failure of the summit.

"And then another meeting of Clinton, Arafat and me was forced upon us. All kinds of Americans are walking around the grounds telling my people that Clinton wants to see me together with Arafat at six o'clock in the evening. On my way to the cabin I went through all the events of Camp David like a movie roll. Actually, we climaxed even before the movie started. I come to Clinton together with Arafat and we wait for Clinton, making small talk. Arafat is in full uniform with a somber expression on his face. I suppose my facial expression was too. Clinton came, wrapped up in one of those ginormous sweaters of his, sits in the middle on his usual rattan armchair, with us on either side and in the middle a small coffee table. From where I sit, next to Clinton, I can see them both, but Clinton has to decide who to look at. Arafat is in a similar armchair, but for me they always brought a chair. I do not like sitting in those deep armchairs and prefer this chair, which is hard and straight-backed. Clinton always starts meetings with an attempt to create a good atmosphere. The technique is to talk about things of a positive nature. This time he told us about the meetings in Okinawa. Among other he shared that there was great excitement of the possibility that there would be an agreement at Camp David and he's sorry he wasn't able to go there with news of a breakthrough. He said there is willingness regarding what we spoke about, because if there's a breakthrough, the G8 will take upon themselves a large portion of the cost of the solution of the refugee problem. And all kinds of little stories, to make us feel comfortable. Occasionally we make a comment, but Arafat sits there with a very serious expression and doesn't say a word. He already knows what I know, that the three meetings Clinton had with the teams were not good, in that both sides communicated positions of moving back rather than going forward. The conversation is serious because we all know that if we don't reach a breakthrough here, we'll be packing in day or two and each one of us will have to report to themselves, their people and the world. I feel that in terms of the internal game, we have the upper hand - in terms of who the Americans view as the party that more consistently acted in benefit of the cause. In the meantime Clinton describes the course of business in the four teams. His problem is that there were things he agreed on with the teams in preliminary conversations and now he feels that there is a move backward. He refers to the historic responsibility on all our shoulders, in particular theirs and ours. At the same time he says, 'Look, I can't force you to sign an agreement.' We know from the peace team that he told them that the progress we have made makes the difference between us and the Palestinians. After Clinton each of us speaks about the heavy responsibility we carry and that we acted according to the best of our conscience and the national interest that we represent. I said that the

responsibility is in our hands, that I take great risks and I am not ignoring the risks that you, Arafat, are taking, but no one is going to do this for us. There is also no other solution and we have to understand that we are throwing our two nations into a blood-ridden tragedy. I explained for the thousandth time that we have vital things we can in no way concede but I think they leave room to reach an agreement, we respect your opinions but I think you must consider once again your response."

Arafat speaks after Barak. "I can't tell you what he thinks about me,' Barak says, "but I know what I am to him as conflict manager: a hard nut. He has no problem with Peres, there are lots of fireworks, but in the end he concedes. Bibi doesn't want to give, but when he comes up against a wall, he folds and it's so easy to recruit the world against him. But Barak is an odd bird. He stands. He doesn't give anything and the world stands behind him…when Arafat contends, he never argues or locks horns with me personally. He even doesn't say, Barak is wrong. He says we've been very flexible and guides it between the drops with his eye simultaneously on Clinton, the Europeans and of course his own people. Clinton mentioned he had spoken with some of the Arab leaders over the weekend and found them supportive, and this entire conversation takes about half an hour and everybody understands it's the last chance and it ends with nothing. After we left one of the Americans runs after Arafat. We waited. Nothing."

And still, Clinton does not despair. At night he meets with Arafat once again. "You sacrifice the future of your people for a bunch of Muslim leaders who would sell you down the river without blinking twice." He says to him. Here too, Arafat doesn't blink. Later, late at night, Erekat or someone comes to Clinton and tells him that "Arafat rejects the proposals and that is that."

Afterwards, much later at night, Clinton comes to Barak's cabin. Just arrives, with a cigar in his mouth and one in hand for Barak, they sit on the balcony and talk. It was important to Clinton that Barak understand that he did everything. That he understands the significance of the process and what this says about the entire process. He says to Barak: "I don't know how to read this man, Arafat, through and through. And I don't know if it's a sense of a historic mission, or fear of the day-to-day management of a state, or if he's fallen in love with his role as revolutionary that flies across the world and is accepted everywhere, and perhaps he really is afraid of his people. But," Clinton says to Barak, "I will stick to what we agreed."

What Barak agreed upon in advance was that if it turns out that Arafat is not ready, "it will be clear that we came to find out exactly what Arafat wants, so we don't find that we have become the party's suckers, and were willing to go very far so as not to be in a situation in which we don't know if he's really willing or not, and the moment he retreats, have a reliable witness that tells the public, the people and the world the truth."

And Clinton did indeed keep his promise and in his speech held Arafat responsible. Barak says that "he was in a very emotional state. Clinton is a very efficient 'politician', among other because this is not a game to him. When he is emotional, then he's truly emotional. And he really cares. And he is a 'politician' in

that he would never do anything that would harm him or the American interest. He is a man of facial expressions, and his responses are sensitive, complex and visible. A talented statesman, but it is possible that at the end he was lacking some firm harshness with Arafat. My feelings were that something is missing. Overall, Clinton is a very talented man, understands details and extremely political - he knows how to round corners, to smooth things over and give the right formulation, therefore it's hard to attribute the failure to something technical or mechanical. There couldn't be a president who was a better mediator than him, he banged on the table, he got red in the face, he reproached Abu Ala once and Arafat himself once. And with all this it is possible that something harsh was missing, something that the Americans after all couldn't get across. I can't say," Barak hesitates, "if Bill Clinton, the person, or the entire American staff had that inner strength necessary for 'the stick'. That it's convincing not only in the sense that you'll be master of your own destiny, but also implicitly, as in "don't be surprised if we'll be against you when directions change.' I don't know if Arafat read or got that implicit message. I don't know. When I examine the final stage, when Clinton tried to get Abdallah and Mubarak on board and they tried to get the Moroccans and maybe others, it turns out that Arafat, in talks, in how he talked and in the form of the discussions over Jerusalem, simply flanked himself. The result was that we tried to come toward him and he encountered a flank that he could not strategically free himself of. Because if there is no agreement, everything discussed will be as if it had never been. At the tactical stage he complicated things whether because he misunderstood, or because of misappreciation of our positions and guided it to impossible positions. And once he did that, and once reports from the field about what he conceded come in, he creates a situation in which it is impossible to move forward without national damage, even if it is symbolic damage. And at this point he should have read a much clearer American threat. And I presume that he, perhaps, didn't read this threat because the Americans hadn't communicated it strongly enough. Something about American behavior communicates some kind of unthreatening friendliness. Look at (James) Baker," Barak says, not concealing a note of yearning, "and how he operated when he was Secretary of State. Those are the 'tough cookies'. Baker communicates it. They know what a tough negotiation is. I've seen it in the intelligence material. When he says 'it's your prerogative, it's legitimate', he is communicating not only that the ground is shaky, but that America means it. There will be a price to pay and it is on you. And all this without actually saying the words. With Clinton there will not be a blatant admission at the end, one that says, 'you will come to beg and cajole and we will tell you that you chose your path as is your right, but forget about us. You should have known, you weren't born yesterday. What America says, America means.'"

Barak learns about his summit from President Carter's Camp David summit: "Carter understood that nothing comes from discussions with leaders. His conclusion was the reverse. He personally ran the negotiations until the end and no teams worked there. This isn't Clinton's style. He's a sprinter and he's a marathoner. After three days Carter realized that the dialogue between Begin and Sadat will lead nowhere. Everything was declarations, so he took Justice Aharon Barak who was the Attorney

General, and Osama El-Baz on the other side, and in fact began drafting the agreement with them filling in the gaps using a method by which he consults with Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman on the one side and with Muhammad Ibrahim Kamel on the other side. In terms of content he spoke with the lower ranks and the work itself was led by him personally, in handwriting - not the Secretary of State or the National Security Advisor, but he himself. He came in person to the meetings of Begin's delegation and firmly conducted persuasion campaigns on both sides."

At this point in time, an end-of-chapter atmosphere prevailed in Barak's delegation: "Clinton believes that even if this is the end, it is only fitting for the United States that the conclusion be respectable." The last round took place on July 25 in the morning "so it wouldn't seem like it will evaporate without clarifying that we didn't find a partner and without clarifying where the responsibility lies, and also so no one should say we parted shouting. So we sat together. Clinton, Arafat, Danny Yatom, Nabil Abu Rudeineh and Bruce Rydell, or Rob Malley, and me."

Barak and Arafat spoke briefly and stiffly. "We didn't come to an agreement and it's a shame, etc." Clinton tried to soften: "positions were clarified and gaps were narrowed," but everyone understood what this was about. It was important to Barak that Clinton place the responsibility at Arafat's feet. That everything that transpired at the summit is not valid and doesn't exist: "No one deluded themselves that it would be struck from the world's collective memory," he says, "but it was clarified that the ideas raised have no official diplomatic validity for future use."

Amnon Lipkin comes up to Barak and says to him: "Ehud, you did everything possible. I can't and won't ever be able to come complaining."

Dan Meridor, who after the Jerusalem discussion said that he doesn't agree with Barak but Ben-Gurion would have done the same, walked about uncertain. "If it had succeeded, he would have been with us" Barak says. Not cynically, but with his same unfiltered vision: "Despite his positions, due to national responsibility and understanding of the alternative."

"What Ehud has been through these past days is almost superhuman," says Ben-Ami.

Barak is not one for soul searching. Outside there is a certain situation. The problem is how to gain control of it and part of that process involves internal and external control. The best coping mechanism, some would say recuperation, for him is hibernation-like sleep and a business-as-usual routine, but there is more than a hint of urgency, if not survival instinct, in the way he prepares himself for the cold and cruel world that awaits him already on the plane returning the delegation home.

On July 25 the summit is officially concluded. "The peace process isn't dead," says Barak, "but it suffered a harsh blow. Despite the shift of the tectonic plates of Israeli positions one toward the other and forward too, in unpredictable directions. To reach an agreement we will need a significant change in the fundamental Palestinian position."

He couldn't have known that in two months all of this will be drowned out by the events of the Intifada.

The End: Defensive Alert

At this stage he is busy assessing, controlling and minimizing the damage with himself. Immersed in the background noise of the farewell ceremonies and luggage packing he is as always vigilant of a chance ambush, lying in his plane seat with eyes closed. An inner turmoil of sadness, anger and disappointment runs through him, but as always, he is careful not to disclose the wildness convulsing inside of him. It is clear to him that the failure lies with Arafat, Arafat and once again, Arafat. This shudder, climbing from his gut to his throat, is the knowledge that we "are on the road to catching fire", and in the corner of his heart another thought sneaks in. Heaven forbid, nothing Middle-Eastern Israeli style, such as 'why didn't that Clinton push Arafat into the corner and choke him a bit,' but rather: "an administration that invested seven years in its most important project could have thrown some more, decisive, weight on Arafat. Sandy, Albright, maybe Clinton himself. And Arafat? Is that man even ready for change?"

It is clear to him that from here on in he expects to encounter people lying in wait at every turn, and he prepares himself for the wounding dialogue with the world.

"Even before Camp David my assessment was that if I return without a framework agreement we'd have to tell people the truth. That there isn't a partner. That matters are not yet ripe and prepare accordingly."

He reckons that the only way to survive, personally and the whole process, is to establish a national unity government, but he has a timing problem.

"If I would have established a national unity government before the end of Clinton's term, we would have entered a tunnel of blood and fire - headed by me however, and not by Arik, but on the other end the Israeli left, a third of the people and half of the combat soldiers, together with Arafat and his gang, and opposite us the Clinton administration, the Europeans and the UN, and they would have all spoken in one voice and said that Israel has abandoned the political process" despite the fact that Arafat was mentally and personally willing to pay the price immediately at the onset of the process. Barak is a system product who perhaps wasn't born for kingship but is destined to fight for it to the end. At this stage he prepares his team for the airborne press briefing, that is the explanations that are supposed to be the best for pushing back the disappointed leftists and mainly the disappointed centralists who are the majority, including maintaining the support of the world and the crevice through which he might be able to return to the negotiation table. But above and beyond the media spin technique and the naïve and seemingly innocent questions, the real questions and the real people awaited. You have to sell something to the press, but you have to tell the real people things as they are. And the airplane is filled with men and women that looked at him and wondered what had been and what will be, and as is the nature of the dynamics in a setting with both heads and tails, they wondered what was going through Barak's mind. As far as he's concerned he communicates and says business as usual: "I didn't promise to end the conflict," he let slip, with a lightly

reprimanding tone, as is his way. “After all, already last year I told you that within 15 months we will know if we have a partner. So now we know. There is no partner.”

The commander can't show signs of crashing, even if the temple veins are pulsating furiously. This muscle, the muscle of self-maintenance now twisting inside of him, is strained to the last of its ligaments. While on the plane he asks himself (and answers in the same breath) how to prepare for the round of blood that is most probably waiting at the end of the process that collapsed. He is determined that Arafat understand, by means of force, that he can't get his own by using force. This is blood and victims we’re talking about. And you can't say this in public because the negotiation technique is to communicate to Arafat that that’s it. The matter failed. He carries the responsibility. And he’d do well to rethink and come back to the negotiation table. And if it doesn’t work in calm and he initiates a wave of violence, it will work with force, but at the end of the road the negotiation table awaits again. Between him and himself Barak knows that the responses have to be decisive, but in the meantime everyone lives with an awful sense of disappointment that might roll down an election landslide. Never mind the inner-party alliance that has in any case been organizing his downfall from the moment he rose, but the wave of disappointment and fear from what is to come now threatens to drag in the bewildered center. His people too, the backbone if Israeli society as Barak perceives it, are helpless.

Barak knows that he is currently standing trial in the court of history. As weird as it might sound to those involved in the public and media mechanism, he is less concerned by the trial of the media, but attempts to convey the message of the current battle cry that surpasses the now.

“If we project today’s social and media reality on 1947, what would they say? The chairman of the Jewish Agency’s Executive, one Ben-Gurion, a weak Jew who can’t withstand the pressures, as was apparent already in Baltimore, came in ’47 and in order to prevent war was prepared to agree to the awful partition plan, three cantons connected by laces, only to satisfy international pressure. He believed he would thus prevent war, but got also a partition plan without Jerusalem and a point of contact with Jerusalem, also a war and territory defined by coercion - a huge disgrace. But the truth is that it was quite the opposite: Ben-Gurion’s acceptance of the partition plan and its rejection by the Palestinians is what enabled the world’s support of Israel in the War of Independence and to hold the achievements of the war since. And we know these are great historical resolutions that, for whoever has the courage and determination and does not fall apart with every gunshot, hold extraordinary possibilities. For peace and for war. Also exhausting the opportunity to achieve a state without confrontation is also the creation of the foundations for national unity in case there will be a confrontation. And mainly, it is historically responsible behavior.”

But in those days no one is dealing with historical and strategic analysis. Everyone is looking for the one responsible for what seemed to be a dashed dream. Among the summit participants were those who said that the whole story was down to the wisdom of bargaining. “Ehud started with 50-60 percent of the territory. And if he

thought it wasn't for real, then that's not how you work in the Middle East. Here, if you want to end up with 97 percent, start at 93. When you start at 50 and get to 97 they no longer believe you that this is where you draw the final line. Why, if you went 47, you won't move another two?"

The Palestinian version of Camp David events is provided by Abu Mazen. Though he does so in an interview to a Syrian newspaper ("Tishreen") in order to soften Assad junior toward Arafat's visit, this version is Arafat's official cover story: "I left for Camp David like all of our delegation with much fear and pressure," Abu Mazen recounts. "The Israelis thought they would be able to achieve concessions from the Palestinians, but we insisted on the need to first prepare the negotiations. I said to Barak that whoever thinks that the Palestinians can concede the land, the borders, Jerusalem, the refugees, is deluding himself. This is the official and rational Palestinian position: a complete return to the 1967 borders, and if there is any need for small changes and equal value/size exchanges, we will make them. We cannot agree to the settlements. Israel has to recognize its responsibility for the refugee issue and the right of return and then we will agree on the method for implementing this right. We said in advance: East Jerusalem has to return to us and West Jerusalem has to be an open city, with cooperation of the two municipalities. We knew that the failure of the summit was certain. We knew we could not reach a solution of a hundred-year-old issue in a week or two or three. We had a feeling that Clinton wants to crown the end of his term with a victory that will be at our expense. Also, Barak's government began to weaken and he could only strengthen it by means of any victory. We knew all this, but so no one should say that the Palestinians are afraid to go to the summit - we went.

"The Americans and Israelis constantly applied personal and collective pressures on him. They presented us with a grim picture if we were to refuse. We received threat letters such as if you don't accept we'll destroy your Authority, this will be your end, your people will curse you, the United States will renounce you. At Camp David we felt as if we were in prison.

"Barak refused to grant the Palestinians the right of return. He refused to be responsible for providing reparation. He refused to take responsibility for the tragedy. Israeli representatives said that it could be one of the contributing states. That is, participate in the establishment of a fund that will award reparation to those who do not want to return and are in need of reparation. Unfortunately, when we were at Camp David there were only two-three meetings on the issue. The issue of the refugees is highly sensitive. Across the world there are four million refugees who all left the historic land of Palestine and have the right to return to their homes. We are not obligating the refugees to return, but if some of them do want to return, it will be conducted according to an agreement between us and the Israelis.

"At first the Israelis spoke about the Wall that includes the Wailing Wall and the Western Wall. Then they spoke about the Armenian Quarter and then about the Moroccan Quarter. They called it the 'Jewish Quarter'. We told them that we will not agree to them having any presence at the Western Wall, but they can hold religious

ceremonies at the Wailing Wall. Regarding the Jewish neighborhood we can find a solution. Beyond that, all of Eastern Jerusalem should be ours.

"On the last day the proposed the funniest of proposals. That the Palestinians have custody on the Temple Mount and the Israelis of what is underneath. Of course we saw this as a humiliating offer.

"When Israel says we offered 95 percent, I ask why not 100 percent? When they say almost complete control of Jerusalem, I ask why shouldn't the control be complete? When they talk about Israeli bases, why shouldn't there be international forces? Like in Sinai, South Lebanon or the Syrian border? What was actually proposed to us means cantons, not an independent state.

Proposed: 91% at Camp David, 94% in Taba, in return for land exchange of one to three percent. That is, about five percent that are the size of twice the Gaza Strip remain. That is, they want to take territory twice the size of the Gaza Strip in the West Bank.

"For personal reasons unknown to me, Barak didn't appear at all on some of the days. He hid and didn't meet with his colleagues or with the Americans. We didn't know the reasons for his seclusion. But there is something of great importance. That there wasn't a three-way meeting - him, Clinton, and Arafat. Though it would be fair to assume that they would meet, talk and coordinate positions. This didn't happen even once. Barak would dispatch the delegations and they would waste time.

"No one has ever been exposed to the pressure exerted on us. We are not rigid and extreme or support terrorism, and we want peace, but not at all costs - peace based on justice, not even absolute justice, but justice confirmed by international legitimacy. We didn't miss an opportunity, we were saved from a trap."

Following these and other versions, when required to give answers in hindsight, Barak says: "The essence of what we did at Camp David was very simple - since there's no way to examine what they really want and we'll never know if we don't sit down and put things on the table, so we came to Camp David. All they said was that we were talking about one hundred minus a few percent and if that's the bargaining position then we have where to start. On the security zones they agreed more clearly and there was the issue of the blocs of settlements where our preference was that at 12% we have good blocs and at 6% we have narrower and more problematic blocs. Regarding Jerusalem, the concept we went for was of a united Jerusalem, in which there is room for our capital in our Jerusalem and their capital in their areas, and there are disputed areas. What I was willing to raise in Jerusalem in not very far from what was agreed in the Beilin-Abu Mazen talks in '95. Except for the issue of sovereignty on the Temple Mount. At this stage the argument was over a flag on the Holy Sepulcher and the Palestinians, wisely on their part, don't create a situation of there's nothing to talk about because it's all nonsense, because then it breaks and they are responsible. Rather, they create a fog near the mediation area. On our side there is what I call a western positive approach, so there is real intent to solve the problems."

Perhaps the story begins and ends with Arafat?

"It is possible," he says, "that in his case the order of cause and effect is reverse: first Arafat needs to decide if he is Sadat slash Ben-Gurion, or the leader of an unending uprising, and my assessment was that there is a chance that he's going in the right direction from our point of view."

After it all ended, Clinton said to him that our problem may be that the man has fallen in love with his role as leader of a terrorist movement, with the uniform and *kaffiyah*. He flies around the world and everywhere he lands he gets the royal treatment and an honor guard, whereas as president he would be the president of a remote state. Who would have paid him any attention? "Alternatively," Barak believes, "it is possible he has a Salah al-Din outlook (Salah al-Din united all the Muslims and fought off the Crusaders, including from Jerusalem, 1138-1193). Go figure. What am I, an explorer of the heart? I play with the dice that actually exist. As far as I am concerned I have to take into account that he is perhaps saying, we are in a historic period and it isn't enough for us that we've obtained three quarters of our dream and we have to have complete satisfaction - or nothing, and complete satisfaction is that we win at the end. That after fifty years it will be proven that we won."

How can you know?

Barak shrugs: "Oslo was based on a presumption that this isn't a deterministic process, that there is dialectic at work here. That the world's attitude toward Arafat as the leader of a state will bring about his transformation. We will help him, equip and train them, he will receive money and international backing and become a persona grata - and it didn't work."

The question that preoccupied the Israelis and Americans is: did the Palestinians come with an advance intention to thwart the talks? Barak doesn't think that they came with such intent or awareness. "But they only said: If Barak gives everything, there is an agreement. But they didn't define what everything is. If they would have come and said we want '67 borders, we would have said we want one percent more than '67 - several Israeli neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and a few other large settlements - and that comes to a total of two percent, then they might have said that we demand two percent in return elsewhere, and that didn't happen. As if paralysis gripped them. Let's assume that they demand right of return for the refugees and let the refugees choose, and say, we think that not many will choose to return but that is their right - they never said this explicitly, but it came through in the spirit of things. Arafat would generally take a mirror image of what we offered, such as access to Haram al-Sharif, and say: 'I give you נקניק חופשי in your sovereignty to the Western Wall,' so I'm not saying that they didn't enter serious negotiations at all. Rather, that they expected a complete surrender."

It is true that at the same time "they came believing that Israel and America forced the summit on them, and what happened later strengthened this feeling. Particularly because of our joint publicity effort with the Americans that was aimed at proving that the Palestinians are to blame for the failure. It only served to confirm their initial basic assumption that this is an Israeli-American coordinated summit, the problem is that this was really not the case. The truth is that I have nothing to hide

from the Americans, unless we formulate our positions during the course of the summit. So we sit on the balcony, to avoid eavesdropping, but coordination in terms of a unified position? What are you talking about?"

After the conclusion of the summit, the participants begin wondering too. Most are committed and loyal to Barak personally and mutter their criticism among friends. All are members of a dramatic fraternal order and comrades-in-arms of sorts, but drawing conclusions is part of the process of disillusionment and public life has rules that are stronger than the public personalities and thus the partners on this crashed journey began to each share their version in dribs and drabs. And above the rules of friendship and partnership stands the public demand to draw conclusions. The central question was: did this fall apart because of Ehud's nature, Arafat's nature or because of the nature of the conflict?

And how do you place your finger on the right spot without saying this, this and this? Yossi Ginosar who owes nothing to anyone, believes that exhausting the summit on a personal level is what was missing. On the grassed paths of the camp Ginosar battled with Barak over negotiation management techniques. Up until the end of the summit there wasn't a situation in which they both sat down to discuss, even after it was clear that there is nothing to point to where we go next. There were some who thought that before this all falls apart, there must be an attempt of a conversation between the Prime Minister of Israel and the Chairman of the PLO. If the ranks below were not successful perhaps these two will succeed. What do we have leaders for? Amnon Lipkin, Shlomo Ben-Ami, Gilead Sher, Yossi Ginosar and even Danny Yatom all pressured him and later on Clinton also joined in applying the pressure. Arafat was willing. Barak was not convinced. He thought that Arafat wanted to document his positions. Ginosar's assessment is that there is no value to this documentation and he is convinced that you can rely on Barak knowing how to hold such a conversation without being able to document his positions and hold him to his word. If they had met in a tête-à-tête, and after Barak a different Prime Minister was elected, and if Arafat would say to him that Barak told me so much in our private meeting, that would have changed the negotiations? The history of the experience with Arafat and of his private conversations with heads of states reveals that there was never any attempt at documentation or of using documentation.

Friends say that "to some extent, Barak thought that he doesn't have an advantage in a personal encounter. But they are convinced he has a great advantage. Perhaps he thinks his advantage lies elsewhere."

Barak doesn't go for it. First, he's already rolled the conversation with Arafat round and round in his head and nothing comes of it. And second, "any way you look at it, we're not talking about me tempting him. I already have twenty Arafat-hours in all kinds of meetings. How is it relevant if the personal aspect charms him or stirs no-confidence? At this point I also don't have what to hear from him, because it's clear he will not say anything that will commit him. What, is he an idiot? Everything he says is written. He obviously understands that he will not have Clinton in several months, and perhaps he won't have Mubarak in a number of months, so he's not going

to say anything to which he will be committed in the future. And even if Arafat wants to reach an agreement, it's also not worth his while to sit with me. Based on his pattern s of behavior and personality, what he'll do is give Clinton the feeling that he intends to move forward. He'll tell Clinton: 'I'm prepared for hard decisions if the Israeli side is prepared for hard decisions.' Nothing beyond that. He is supposed to instruct his people in the work teams - and he simply doesn't do that. He has instructed his people on the security team. There's no risk here. After all, it's all until a referendum. The discussions there moved very slowly and he controlled the pace. A regret here, another discussion there. And beyond that: nothing."

Most of the summit participants believe that: "we live in the Middle East, and chemistry is very significant here. In communications between people there are by-products that also influence the content, and nuances and understandings that can create an almost infinite rainbow of colors that can change as a result of existing personal and human contact as opposed to lack of contact."

Barak protests: "What does trust have to do with it? Was there trust between De Gaulle and the leaders of the Algerian uprising? Was there trust between the U.S. and Vietnam? Was there trust between Sadat and Begin? It isn't a matter of trust and it isn't a deal between friends. It is a matter of equilibrium reached with both parties brutally sober. And if you unintentionally cross that fine line, and communicate signals of submission instead of negotiation, you have lost the ability to protect your interests. It is true that in principle, in the conditions created, the point of equilibrium is not in the middle. But it must, in principle and essentially, reflect a movement one toward the other on both sides and both parties compromise equally to reach an agreement. It is clear that both parties undergo this process of deliberation in pain and it could be that this part is more painful for them than for us, but that can't be solved between me and Arafat on a personal level."

"It is clear that Camp David didn't collapse over *baklava*. We'll soon move away from the end of Clinton's term," he assess, "and it'll turn out that we have here a clash of national desires and lack of ripeness." And he forlornly adds: "But what we lost in the course of the unsuccessful attempt is the ability to see our justice."

He is told that perhaps they should have left the third phase to Arafat, as he has a signed agreement to that effect. And he rejects: "these are agreements that are signed also by the other side and I say that in the conditions we were up against, coming to discussions about the framework agreements and not finding the other side there, we can't relate to the third phase that was signed under completely different assumptions."

Perhaps he was excessively rigid on the matter of the villages surrounding Jerusalem, the release of prisoners. Here to, he believes that we are dealing with inconsequentialities: "even if I would have thrown a few bones mid-process, it wouldn't have helped. Because at the end of the day, after years of ripening, what happens is the clash of the fundamental positions of two national movements and Arafat's perception of the national issue. This perception says we have to win and cannot concede anything."

On the airplane making its way back from Camp David to Israel there is an atmosphere of sadness. Regardless of the ideological affiliation of those returning, they all heard the muffled and ominous rumble of the nearing thunder. Even the malicious glee of the media at times of crisis didn't leave a dent during that flight back.

A Secular Agenda

As always, the red carpet is lain out in honor of a Prime Minister returning from his journeys abroad and his government ministers and senior officials await him on his arrival. Yossi Sarid, Eli Yishay and Yitzhak Levy are absent.

"We didn't succeed," Barak says blankly, "we extended our hand to peace, we tried as hard as we could without harm to Israel's security, future and holiness, but at this time we do not have a partner."

In Jerusalem there are demonstrations from right and from left at the entrance to his home.

"I know," he says turning to the right-wing demonstrators, "that you are wrong, but your agony is part of the way the Land of Israel is redeemed. When peace comes, we can join hands for the future of us all."

They boo him in response.

Arafat, as opposed to him, was accepted in Gaza as someone who "stood up against Israel and the United States." At the celebration of thousands he said: "On September 13 I will declare the Palestinian state, and whoever doesn't like it is welcome to drink Gaza's sea water."

Barak isn't fazed and conveys a clear message: a unilateral declaration will lead to unilateral annexation. He is convinced that Arafat understands that language.

The Intelligence Branch reports about the situation of before the explosion in the territories.

On the day the talks failed, there was a wedding in the Jilazun refugee camp near Beit-El, during which there was celebratory gunfire. The settlers immediately reported shooting on the settlement, noting that the shots were fired in the direction of the children's playground and that "it's a miracle that no one was injured". Encouraged by the settlement's security coordinator, they went and erected a private barricade at the entrance to the refugee camp.

According to a senior security official, "such an event can be the match that ignites the fire in the territories".

The next day the commander of the Shomron Brigade, Colonel Yehuda Shaked, sent a letter to the 32 settlements in the military sector under his command:

"In light of the fragile and unclear situation," he wrote, "we have added to your armories MAGs and sniper's rifles. You are required to participate in shooting practice. In the coming days we will send you mobilization orders for training in signal, paramedics and sniper courses, among other.

In the Knesset a demand was raised to make the criteria for distributing weapons more lenient for the settlers who thus far had been denied a permit due to security problems or a criminal record.

This is all a build-up of tension toward an explosion. The way to stop the deterioration and continue the negotiations is via the strengthening of the government. Barak says that from his point of view there's nothing barring the return of the Mafdal, Sharansky and Shas to the government. Alternatively, he does not rule out a national unity government with the Likud. The Likud, the Mafdal, Sharansky and the "National Union" are all calling for elections.

What about Shas?

Eli Yishay says that Barak needs to know that he doesn't have Shas in his pocket. Barak has no problem picking up the phone and talking with him. That is, a cordial conversation without saying a purposeful word.

Barak meets with Sharon. He tells him the tales of Camp David and says that given a suitable constellation, there are grounds for going together. Sharon talks about his red lines and Barak says that nothing is happening at the moment. They agree to meet at a later time. The later time is relatively calm because of the Knesset's recess and Barak requests determination from his close surroundings, because "time is on our side and let's wait".

However, Barak's time is up. The man who left accompanied by hearts filled with hope came back empty handed and there is no force in the world that can prevent a disappointed public even the score with the man who let them down. The problem is how this process is carried out and who the public's representatives are. Peres, for example, believes that the issue of Jerusalem should not have been raised as it was and Barak almost flies off the handle when he hears this. As always, in stressful situations such as these he immediately regains composure and moves from the "almost" that is the dam of the raging system within him, and charts it to the arc with indifference at either end, with shards of icy disdain spread on it, to a cold passion of total conviction. Now he is almost impatient: "It is not true that the issue of Jerusalem did not come up. It is not true that we were not prepared to postpone and it is not true that we were prepared to ignore the problem of Jerusalem. Anyway, whoever would have tried to design a meaningful agreement, after seven years of Oslo and two-and-a-half years after the discussion of permanent agreements was supposed to commence, without finalizing the Jerusalem issue, doesn't understand where he's living. There was no such option."

Voices from Cairo spoke about how Mubarak warned Barak about dealing with Jerusalem, and Barak says that "that is simply not true. He told me very clearly: 'I will support whatever you decide between you.' Before Camp David I spoke with Mubarak and with Abdallah. I told them both about my conversations with Hussein about divine sovereignty and dividing the responsibility for their territories and ours. Mubarak did not reject it and Abdallah said he is familiar with the matter from the time his father suggested it. Clinton too spoke about how in principle there needs to be an arrangement that defines what joint life in Jerusalem looks like. So I had pretty wide backup to deal with the issue. We got to the level of discussing what to do when

a bicycle is stolen in the Armenian Quarter. And which police force would deal with it. We agreed that we need to define a set of rules and then reiterated that everything is okay, but we do not accept anything until the other side agrees that this is the basis for discussion and then we will relate to it. And what happened was that the other side panicked and didn't agree."

To set things straight with Mubarak he goes to him, to Cairo, several days after his return to Israel. "I showed him Haram al-Sharif on a large tourist map, and he asked me: 'is the Haram all this square (the entire map, R.A.), or is it just the mosques and the path between them?' After that he asked me where is …using the Arabic term for the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall. 'Why do you weep there?' he asked, 'what is it? What's the story?' and then told me that this was the first time in his life he'd seen a large map of the Temple Mount."

It isn't clear if Barak bought Mubarak's temporary ignorance and he's quick to add: "but on the other hand, when students demonstrated at The American University in Cairo and at Al-Azhar University you could immediately tell from his responses that it was clear that he does understand the effect of the problem."

Ginosar, who communicated the Jerusalem messages between Barak and Arafat, believes that Barak is right. To argue that Barak raised the issue of Jerusalem is like saying that Barak created the conflict. It was clear from the start that until the Palestinian side sees the triangle of territory, refugees and Jerusalem, it will not be possible to make progress with the negotiations, and in any case, the Palestinians demanded to discuss Jerusalem before Camp David. And the Egyptians, that is Mubarak, attempted to come up with all kinds of creative solutions even before Camp David.

But the main claim against him is: what was wrong with the existing situation? Why lead to crisis? Arafat himself said after the summit: "It was a mistake on Barak's part to raise the issue of Jerusalem, it awoke the entire Arab world." But Barak is convinced that without Jerusalem it would not have been possible to reach any agreement.

He doesn't tire of repeatedly explaining: "Why, we would have arrived at the third phase and after it nothing is clear. The state of Israel says that it thinks it is forty one percent, the Palestinians say that they think it's ninety six or ninety seven percent, and the world would have been with them. A situation had arisen in which we give, they take, and afterwards they will say that we breached the agreement and the world is with them and we find ourselves in a predicament and the only way to solve this matter completely is to pose the challenge of coping even without constant demands that it be a full agreement. This is the logic behind Camp David and the reason I had to do it and that it couldn't be postponed."

From Barak's point of view: "up until Camp David everything evolved as expected; what wasn't expected was what came after. Even though on his way out Clinton kept his word and said who was okay and who wasn't okay and said more or less what had transpired, and the Europeans are speaking the same language. But then, on the basis of thoughts that started pecking at some of the Israeli left, and at some of the people around Arafat and at some in the National Security Council, around Sandy

Berger and Robert Malley and at some in Europe around the Swedish - all those thought that something more small is needed. Make more concessions. For me personally, but mainly for other actors, there wasn't absolute clarity that an agreement can be reached with Arafat. Perhaps something more is needed. But I felt that it is probably not possible at this time."

This something that Barak is referring to is the issue of the flag on the Temple Mount. Barak says a definitive "no". Arafat says to him during the talks: "Dayan was a greater general than you, he conquered Jerusalem and insisted on not flying the Israeli flag on the Temple Mount. Why do you insist on representing the extremists on your side?"

However, all this is talk for the protocol and public ear. In retrospect Barak understands that the Palestinians perceived Camp David as a trap - as an Israeli-American coordination, with the Israeli Prime Minister leading the American process. "I recall" says Barak, "that they heard from the President of the United States something that Dennis Ross had first checked with them. Dennis was putting out feelers about a possible option regarding Jerusalem and the President later presented it. Since they perceived Dennis as someone who is first of all coordinated with the Israelis, they straight away said 'ah, sure, it's an Israeli proposal.' They would actually say it in words: 'this is an Israeli proposal, not an American proposal.' And they said it about things that were entirely American, and all Camp David was perceived by them as an Israeli-American move opposite the Palestinians. That is the reason they were wary and evasive as if from fear that we were going to bring them down."

A Storm in the Labor Party

In the meantime a storm is raging in the Labor party, with Shimon Peres contending for the position of President of the State against Moshe Katsav. Supposedly, Peres has a clear advantage over Katsav and the wagging tongues say Barak is against him because he is the first to know that the presidential residence is a position of political power from which Peres can devise moves that will contradict Barak's position. On the other hand, Barak knows that Katsav's victory is the opposition's victory en route to defeating him and that it isn't Peres who is being tested, but rather the image of the state according to Peres.

Despite Peres' sweet talk with the religious and ultra-orthodox, they know that Peres' peace means a pendulum swing in the direction of a secular state, not to mention the demise of the settlement dream. Barak, who knows to rise above personal scores in the face of the state's score, supports Peres.

On Monday, July 30, Moshe Katsav is elected President of Israel.